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Holman Day



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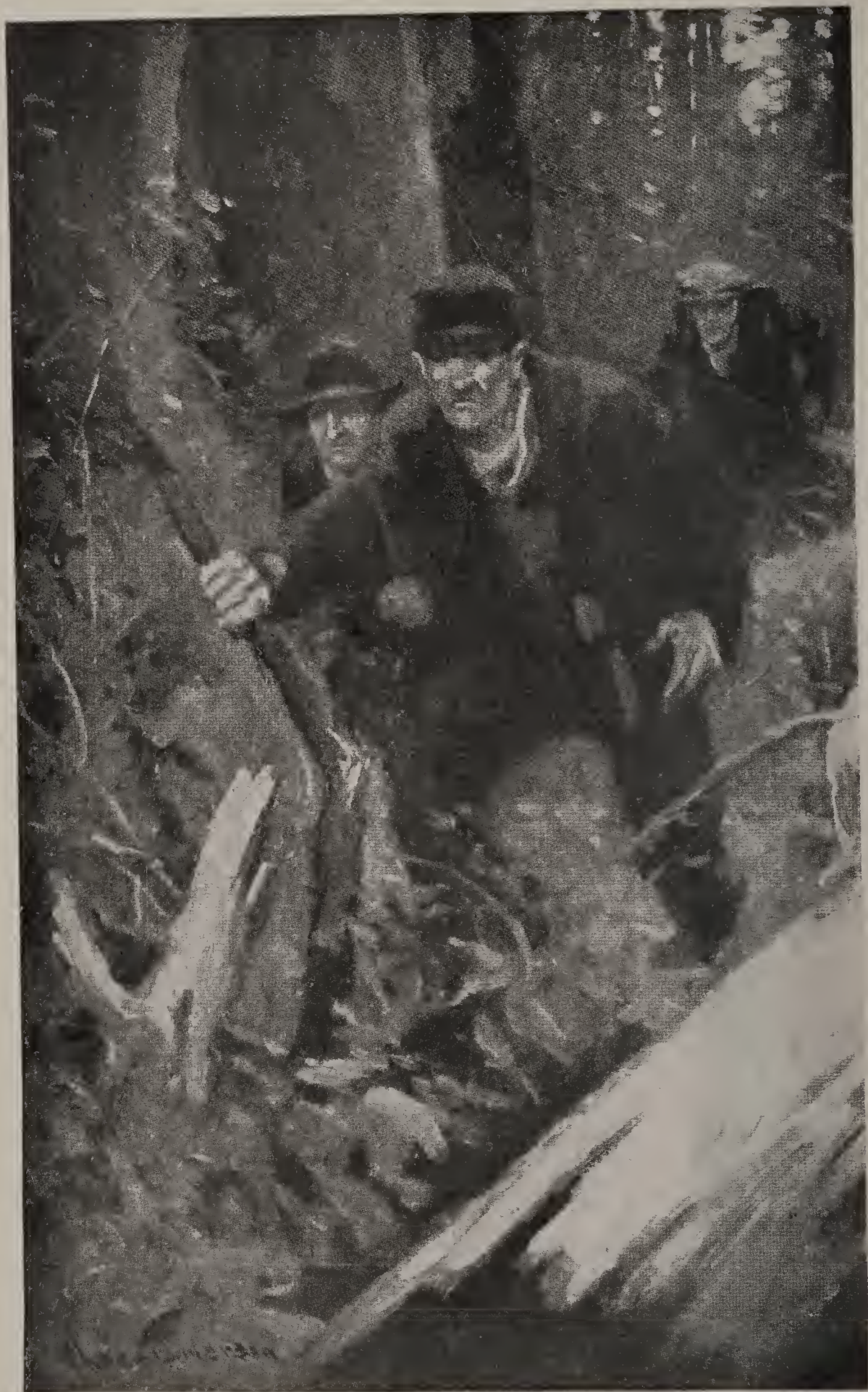




# LEADBETTER'S LUCK







THEY WERE MAKING IT AS HARD AS POSSIBLE FOR HIM



# LEADBETTER'S LUCK

By

HOLMAN DAY ✓  
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# LEADBETTER'S LUCK



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## CHAPTER I

YOUNG Hale had no trouble in recognizing the sound as Jeff Gordon's voice though the two had not met up with each other since graduation in the same class from the school of forestry. It was the full-throated "Wah-hoo-wah!" which had often resounded across Yale's campus and had shocked the classic conservatives who frowned and reprimanded and soulfully consigned Jeff back again to the northern wilds from which he had emerged. But Jeff had taken his own time about going back; he did go after he had received his diploma; a timber baron father, who had awakened to the needs of modern conservation, had been impatiently awaiting his son's return.

There was more or less hilarity in the howl which Richard Hale heard echoing through the woodland aisles. Wide-mouthed, loud-voiced, slapping his thigh to emphasize his remarks, Jeff never could keep joviality out of his tones.

Hale turned quickly from the tree on which he had been inspecting suspicious bolls, breasted his way through a copse and confronted Jeff in a path. The latter danced his college mate around for a time, cackling laughter, saying nothing sensible. Then, "How do you like gardening, Dick?"

That wasn't sensible, either. Richard flushed under his tan. "No slurs, Jeff! I have a good job here."

"Glorified gardening!" insisted the humorist. He swung his arm to point his meaning.

The woodland which stretched about them was carefully kept, a bit artificial even in its more rugged aspects.

From the path were obtained glimpses of gravelled road, of a rockery and carefully pruned shrubs; all revealed artistic "slicking-up" of the natural charms.



"Now, see here!" protested Hale. "I have five hundred acres of real woodland over in the rear of this estate. I'm clearing hard growth, planting a pine tract, developing a stand of spruce, making a test of soils, working out a scheme——"

"In a good big garden," pressed the persecutor. "It's a place with a fence around it."

"But my work here is forestry, up-to-date stuff, with everything to work with."

"Oh, you can play checkers on a postage stamp, using a microscope. But you ought to be moving on the big board, Dick."

"Are you here to offer me a job?" It was a tart query.

Jeff chuckled. "Oh, no! I wouldn't be able to boss you in good shape. Another thing, my old man would mighty soon find out how much more you know about forestry than I do, and he might set *you* to bossing *me*." His grin and the really earnest compliment placated Richard. "I've been down to the big town to make contracts; that's how much confidence my father is putting in me, can't afford to joggle it by letting him run up against a

higher grade man like you, Dick." He grinned more broadly. "Met one of the fellows and he told me where you are located. Dropped off to say hallo."

"That all?" Richard puckered his eyes and showed some incredulity.

"Well, that's a fine biff on the jaw of a friendly spirit!" retorted Gordon. "Honestly, I do want to gab a little with you, old boy, in the style of past days! Get hungry that way once in a while. You know! The timber country is all right—home folks are fine—but fellows who have been in school together and have dreamed out their future in confabs just have to meet up once in a while and compare notes on how the dreams have come out. Now that's confession enough, isn't it?"

Richard replied to that question by grabbing Jeff's hand in another and more understanding greeting.

"Well, let's sit down!" suggested the visitor, about to drop himself on a prostrate tree trunk beside the path.

Richard pulled him away to a boulder.

"That trunk isn't a seat, not for chaps of our size, Jeff. It's bark nailed on a shell frame. Must have picturesque decay for the eyes of the house guests!"

"Oh, widdy-widdy!" scoffed the man from the big woods, "whittling" one forefinger with the other. "How about this rock before I take a chance on it? Stuffed, eh? Does it play a tune when you sit on it?"

Richard tripped his friend and dropped him solidly on the boulder. "Hope that jar will settle a little of the froth!"

"Not a bubble left," confessed Jeff, making a wry face.

"I don't blame you a bit for taking a slam at this kind of forestry. It isn't what I really want to do, this seeding and trimming, forcing and faking. However, I've had a wonderful opportunity to go on with the study of the fundamentals, soils and so forth."

"You always could dig into things," praised Jeff. "I have only slambanged along, hitting the high spots, like I hike over tussocks in a bog when I'm timber cruising. I'll bet you could make a commercial killing in the big

woods if you could have the right lay. The operators up my way sure do need a plan of consistent conservation—something better and more far-reaching than anything that's been attempted so far in our parts. I'm only half doing it, Dick. The rest of 'em, even the big concerns, haven't got down to real bedrock. Why, confound it, they've got now to figuring how much longer it will last instead of calculating on ways to make it last. Of course, there isn't any more slash and slaughter except in certain sections; the pulp concerns are hiring good foresters; but those infernal printing presses are clamoring and chewing day and night, gulping down our good resolutions along with the paper. It's demand—demand—demand!”

“Alas, for the dreams in the case of both of us!” smiled Richard.

“Maybe we're too young. In the north country, underneath, there persists the notion that gray whiskers are better credentials than diplomas. ‘Timber? There always has been enough, hasn't there?’ That fool kind of argument has kept a lot of old-fashioned bosses on



their jobs in the north. Say, haven't you told me that your uncle—what's his name?"

"Weston Hale."

"Isn't he hitched up some way with the Telos Company?"

"He's a stockholder—he has money in a good many things."

"Why hasn't he worked you in there as a forester?"

"I've never asked him to do it."

"If ever a concern did need a dose of modern ideas in conservation that Telos Company does, Dick! My dad's concern is no model, the best I can do; but the Telos isn't even a small imitation of the real thing—and that's what a model is, the jokers tell us. It's a scandal, really, the way old Batterson, their field manager, is operating. He must have got his ideas from the ancient boss who chopped down all the cedars of Lebanon. He's absolutely the last of the old war-horses who stamped the forests flat and raked off the trees like a farmer clears a hayfield. Why the Telos hangs onto such a man I can't understand."

"As I gather, there are several old-fashioned directors on the board. The field manager has always produced results, they say."

"If he keeps on he'll produce ruination, Dick."

"It's too bad," stated Hale, with a forester's true regret in his tones.

"Why don't you have your uncle take his little stockholder's jimmy and pry an opening for you?"

Richard hesitated, then he came out with a confession. "I'm not exactly ace high with my uncle, Jeff. He merely has some of his money in a timber proposition, for the sake of profit; he doesn't look on the woods as I do, loving the big trees, planning for the future."

One of Jeff's staccato laughs! Then he arraigned!

"Aforesaid uncle belonging in Old 'Prof. Piney's' roster of undesirables! Don't you remember that poem he read to the class? I can recall one verse. Wish I could remember the useful stuff, too!"

He quoted.

“‘My curse on those who merely see,  
As thro’ the wood their way they wend,  
Board measure in a stately tree,  
A sawlog standing up on end.’”

“I’m afraid Uncle Weston belongs! He opposed me seriously when I wanted to take up forestry. Of course, he didn’t come right out and say that a man who neglects present opportunity and profit for the sake of generations to come is a fool—but he skimmed around the subject and practically said it of me. He had me lined out for a learned profession. I was in a pretty tough position, Jeff. I never said anything to you in school for I’m no hand to whine. But my uncle became my guardian when my father died—guardian of my sister and myself. I took only enough of the modest estate to put me through school. I made over all the rest to sister, though she protested. But she’s a cripple, poor little sis! And when I left school I had to have a job mighty sudden. So I made up to a millionaire and here I am.”

"And if you should go to affluent but unwise nunky now, slap your manly chest and shout, 'Your Telos needs me! I looked far ahead! Here am I!?' Would he not clasp you in his arms and cry, 'Go, noble boy, into the north and bat old Batterson and kick him up to the times'?"

Richard shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I don't think Uncle Weston would try a kick on me. He's too dignified. But the look he'd give me through his eyeglasses would be just as effective as a kick. And he might say, 'Well, after all, nephew, you've been compelled to come to me for a job in this wonderful forestry work of yours.' A crack like that, Jeff, might strain family relations too much. I hope I've had my last run-in with my uncle."

"But how about your own ambitions? You don't like this—I won't call it gardening, not again, Dicky! But you do want to get into the big woods, now don't you?" pleaded Gordon. "There are opportunities. Sideline chances for a chap who is shrewd in timber stuff. I'm only half as bright as you—shut up! That's the truth. But I've taken the dollars earned



fairly from my dad and I've grabbed off some mighty good pickings from stumpage contracts by being on the ground. At the same time, I'm making progress right along in real conservation. This here—" again he indicated the reservation of the millionaire with a disparaging wave of his hand—"isn't building up anything valuable to give to the world. The north country—that's where you belong. There are some bright boys up there already. We need more."

"And I want to go there," declared Hale with soulful earnestness.

Gordon was only jocularly in earnest when he said, "I think I'll write an anonymous letter to the Telos folks, tell 'em how old Batterson is strangling their goose and advise 'em to stop counting the golden eggs and give an eye to the devoted bird who has been laying those eggs for dividends. Then I'll add that one of their stockholders has a nephew who is sure a wonder in handing first aid to a half-strangled timber goose. What say?"

"I'll say nothing, Jeff! Not to that propo-

sition. I might shock the little dicky-bird in the tree above us—to say nothing of jarring a fine friendship.”

“The same old Dick! In your case it never did rhyme with trick,” returned Gordon ruefully. “I have half a mind to stick wholly to operating and work you into our concern as a forester.”

“I won’t consider such an offer, Jeff. In the first place, you’d disappoint your father, who has educated you to work out his plans.”

“Probably!” He sighed. “Furthermore, you never could stand the language dad uses to me when I bump him hard on one of his old-fashioned corners. When it’s strictly in the family it’s all right, of course. Haven’t you done anything about getting into the big woods?”

“The usual letters, of course. Have tried the big concerns. My name is on file as an applicant. Have taken my nerve along and gone to New York headquarters of the two great paper and pulp companies several times.”



"And nothing doing?"

"Posts all filled."

"So it goes, Dick! The hardest stunt for a young chap is to get his first chance to show what he can do. The story books invariably have true merit win. It does win all right enough after a fellow gets his first show. But luck and pull are big elements at the set-off. Sad but true! Of course, they ask what you're doing now?"

"Yes!"

"This job is only—but I won't say it! Remember, however, you're trying to get in with the big timber boys. They ask pointed questions. Really you'd stand a better show if you'd chuck this landscape business and forget you ever meddled with it. Are you ahead of the game?"

"I have saved all I could—a few hundred dollars."

"Won't take a loan from me if you need it?"

"I can't do it, Jeff. But I'm grateful."

"And gritty! By thunder, you've got the

right elements for the woods, Dick. Too bad you're not up there. If you won't condescend to try pull——"

"It isn't a matter of condescending, Jeff. Please don't take me for a stiff-necked fool. I almost hate the word pride because it's so often misinterpreted. I want to be in the big woods, of course. But I didn't sit around, loafing, till I got a job which exactly suited me: I'll do my best here till I can do better. Suppose we drop the subject for a time! Come along with me and examine some of my soil experiments. Even you, Mister Big Timber, may be able to pick up a few ideas."

"Sure I can. Always did kow-tow to your caput, Dicky!"

The June afternoon was mellow. The woodland was inviting. They trod the checkerings of sunshine and shade, canvassing reminiscences of their palship in the days at school.

At the end of the exploration Richard led Jeff to a lodge in the woods. It was assigned to the forester for his sole tenancy.

"The Big Boss offered me a servant. I don't want one. I like my own cooking. Hope *you'll* like it."

Gordon complimented that dinner with speech and gusto. He was as hearty in his appetite as he was in his laughter.

After the dinner they paddled a canoe on the lake.

"It's fine," averred Jeff, "but wait till you get into the north and catch the thrill of the white water!"

In his discourse he made repeated references to the attractions of the big woods; it was shrewd and calculated attempt to inflame Hale with the spirit of adventure.

Pondered Gordon, "I'll get him so he'll run to nunky and beg on bended knee for a job with Telos. It's in Dicky and it's got to come out."

Jeff stayed the night and was assiduous in his prodding. Departing, he left behind him a singularly depressed young man. In Hale was a veritable and poignant homesickness, as if he were kept from his own by a network of aggravating circumstances.

He meditated regarding those "big elements" on which his friend had dwelt.

Richard was still disinclined to work his pull, such as it was. On mere luck he placed little dependence.

But he did sit down and write to the Telos president an earnest letter, asking for a position, making no reference to the fact that he was the nephew of a stockholder in the corporation.

## CHAPTER II

DIRECTOR DIXON stood up when he eased his mind; for a director to stand and talk in a meeting of the directors of the Telos corporation was unusual, but Mr. Dixon seemed to require that posture for his complete outpouring; occasionally he pounded his fist on the table, a procedure most unusual in a Telos meeting. The older directors blinked when he emphasized by a fist-whack; Mr. Dixon was young and a new director.

He breezily berated old methods.

He made some cutting references to Field Manager John P. Batterson and called that Telos executive "the last of the Mow-hack-'uns."

"I don't like to have a faithful worker attacked behind his back," observed Director Todd, of the old guard.

"Well, bring him here in front of me and I'll say the same things to his face," de-



clared Dixon. "As I understand it, he has been requested to come here to headquarters, time and time again, and pays no attention to the requests."

"Mr. Batterson is a rather peculiar man," returned Todd.

"Strictly of the old type," agreed elderly Sprague. "Of the woods and in the woods, impatient where meddlers are concerned, but devoted to his work."

"And has always turned in excellent profits," endorsed President Mallon.

"Oh, I know the majority here is against me," confessed Dixon. "You have cleaned up handsomely in the past, gentlemen. My good father, God rest his soul, profited along with you and if he were here would probably take a stand with you against me. But I represent the newer stockholders who must look to the future for their profits. Our rivals are using modern methods. Unless the Telos faces about and provides for a future by conservation and more careful cutting we'll soon be scratching mighty hard for profits."



"Batterson reports unlimited supply," said the president.

"Yes, for his own life-time, if he doesn't live too long. All the old fellows have been like that. I beg your pardon, gentlemen, for referring to age. But if you were young and strong enough to travel our tracts on your own two feet, as I have been doing this spring, you'd see what I have seen—a deliberate system of slaughter of timber for ready returns. Batterson is gouging just the same as tricky men make a gold mine show up well by cleaning out the high-grade pockets. Our timber is our capital; I represent the objectors. This isn't a display of altruism for the sake of generations to come. It's straight business. We must stop destroying capital."

Director Dixon sat down. He was flushed and nervous. It had taken courage to blaze away at the complacency of those profit-taking oldsters of the Telos.

"It's your idea, is it, that we should replace Mr. Batterson with another manager?" queried the president frigidly.

"I have not said that, sir."

"But when one tears down he should be ready with something constructive, definitely so. Have you in mind somebody who can do the work better than Batterson is doing it?"

"No, sir."

"Let me say this," interposed Director Sprague. He, too, rose. "In the past, when I was able to get about better, I used to go into our woods frequently. I watched John P. Batterson and I considered then, just as I believe today, that he is the best timber operator in the north country. He can get out of his men every ounce that's in them. He knows his country, every trick in the game. He's invaluable. With his knowledge and experience he is worth more every year. How many agree with me?" he demanded.

Unmistakably, there was a majority in favor of Batterson.

Mallon, as president, took the rôle of mediator.

"I'll confess, I lean toward Batterson. He has served us well. But our younger ele-

ment, heirs and stockholders, will be left ere long to carry on the work and must be considered now in these changing times. Outside of removing our present field manager, what have you to suggest, Mr. Dixon?"

"An expert, technical report on our timber resources. A criticism on our present methods. An estimate of Batterson's real value in these new days when our rivals are adopting more advanced methods."

"But nothing to offend Mr. Batterson!" put in the irreconcilable Sprague.

"What is he, lord of us all, or our hired man?" demanded Dixon hotly.

"I presume the business can be transacted tactfully," suggested the mediating president. "I suppose you would leave the matter to an expert forester, Mr. Dixon?"

"That's my idea."

"Anybody in mind?"

"Not especially. But one of the new crop, of course! A real up-to-date fellow!"

"I received a letter a few days ago and was considerably impressed by the writer's

earnestness in stating his case and his capacities. I'll call for it."

He pressed a button and gave orders to the clerk who appeared.

"Did he say he is a forestry school graduate?" queried Dixon while they were waiting.

"Oh, yes! Yale."

"Ought to be a good man. Doing anything now?"

"He's chief forester on the extensive Craigmore estate; you've heard of it."

"That isn't big timber experience."

"So he stated. But he has had field work in black growth timber, he says, and is qualified generally."

The clerk appeared with the letter and President Mallon read it aloud.

"That sounds mighty good to me," affirmed Dixon, on the side of zealous youth.

"It's not bad, though there's considerable folderol in forestry, so I'm convinced," stated Sprague.

"What did you say the name is?" pressed Dixon.

"Richard Hale."

"Never heard of him, though that's not surprising."

"I think I have, if it's the same party," volunteered Director Todd. "My good friend, Weston Hale, has a nephew who took up forestry."

"The young man doesn't mention such a relationship in his letter. It seems rather strange because he didn't," said President Mallon, with a strictly business estimate of what was valuable in getting a job. "He should have reflected that it might help him."

"The fact he didn't resort to any such means sets him up a few notches in my regard," declared Dixon. "He must be one of my kind."

"Why don't you call Mr. Weston Hale on the telephone and make sure the young man is his nephew, Mr. Todd?" queried the president.

Director Todd went on the errand.

He reported, when he returned, "It's his nephew, gentlemen."



"Did he solicit for the young man?" asked Mallon.

"Not at all! Seemed rather cool about the business. Said Richard has chosen to make his own way, according to his own ideas, and that the young man's failure to mention the uncle as a means of getting the job was quite characteristic of the nephew."

"I vote for young Hale," cried Dixon impulsively.

"There's no motion before the board," chided the president.

"Well, let's have one then. I'll make way for my elders in that respect," replied Dixon, grinning.

But there was a silence, somewhat prolonged. It was broken by President Mallon.

"I must take a position between the two parties, I feel. The fact that Richard Hale is the nephew of a heavy stockholder puts a rather different aspect on the case."

Even at the risk of appearing too obtrusive in the argument, Director Dixon allowed the spirit of reliant youth to prompt him. "According to that fine letter, the appli-

cant is perfectly capable of standing on his own feet. I seriously object to having him know that we were influenced by his relationship to Weston Hale. I know what his feelings would be."

The president's grim features expressed rebuke. "If Director Dixon had allowed me to proceed he would have had no occasion to make his remark."

"Pardon me, Mr. President! I have been talking too much today, I'll admit." He lighted a cigar and plugged his mouth.

"It will be much better if the young man does not think we were influenced in any way by Mr. Weston Hale. As a matter of fact, we are not. I don't know the nature of the nephew, of course. If he thinks we selected him on account of his uncle he may slack up in his work later, if we hire him; he may believe that his uncle's influence will keep him on with us. Suppose, before we engage him, we pledge ourselves to conceal from him the fact which has just come to our knowledge!"

Dixon was loudest in his affirmation.

"What I meant when I said 'different aspect' was this: The nephew of a stockholder will be especially interested in all the affairs of the Telos in the north. I'm going to make a frank reference to something, gentlemen! Mr. Batterson is efficient, we all know. We are also more or less familiar with certain rumors which have come down from the north in regard to our manager's tactics. We have allowed him much leeway. Probably, in certain lines, he is doing only what other field managers do for a side profit. If Batterson is going too far we can probably depend on being informed by young Hale."

"Are we sending a forester or a spy into the north country?" inquired Sprague indignantly.

"We give him no orders, sir. He'll just naturally report on all conditions. Therefore, the nephew of a stockholder is especially valuable."

"I don't like Batterson," blurted the irrepressible young director, "but I don't want to dislike later a chap who writes a letter

like the one you've read to us, Mr. President. I hope he'll keep his mouth shut except about his findings in regard to timber. If we're after stuff on the field manager we'd better hire detectives."

"With the consent of the board," went on Mallon, ignoring Dixon's remark, "I'll communicate with Richard Hale and ask him to come here for an interview. Do I hear any objections?"

There were none.

"If he proves up as a capable forester we'll engage him. The other matter will undoubtedly take care of itself—in view of the fact that he'll have his uncle's interests at heart," persisted the president, frowning on Dixon.

"I believe I led the cheering on that pledge thing," stated the square-dealer. "All right! My mouth is shut! But I'm sorry."

## CHAPTER III

RICHARD HALE was not over-elated when he received a letter from President Mallon of the Telos company. A telegram summoning him would have indicated a real interest and an actual need, so he reflected, estimating his chances. The letter was a laconic invitation to call at the Telos general offices at his convenience. "Something may come from the interview," hedged Mr. Mallon.

At any rate, thought Richard, a bit of a push had discounted mere pull to some extent and, perhaps, had set luck on the move. He decided to keep pushing.

The letter came to him on a morning. In the afternoon he was on a train bound for the city of his hopes. In applying to the master of the Craigmere domains for a brief leave of absence he explained that he wished to pay a visit to his sister. It was an excusable half-truth; he had not seen Marion



for some months; he knew with what pathetic eagerness the shut-in awaited his rare visits.

She dwelt with a companion-housekeeper in the suburbs of the city which was his destination.

He dropped off the train and walked to the cottage and was received with ecstatic greeting.

In the evening he and Marion talked over the new prospects.

Vague as those prospects were just then, she was alternately delighted and depressed; she understood his ambition but the thought of his probable long absences in the north worried her. She wistfully apologized for such worries.

"You have made all the sacrifices for me, Dick. How selfish I am!"

"The subject of sacrifice has long been taboo, little sis!" He softened the rebuke by patting her hand.

"And you're determined not to ask Uncle Weston to intercede?" That phase had been canvassed between them.

"I wouldn't feel right in my mind if I

got the job that way. If I'm taken on, the truth will come out later, of course; but if I'm hired on the basis of a straight business proposition there'll be no tag ends to the thing. I can go ahead as straight for-ester; it's bad to be hooked up with favoritism. The field manager, so I understand, is a hard man to get along with. He must be made to understand that I'm not up there spying on an uncle's account."

In that frame of mind Richard went to the Telos offices the next morning.

His interview with President Mallon was brief and not conclusive.

"I like your style of set-up, young man," acknowledged the head of the Telos. "You look as if you are well able to get about in the woods." He tapped the packet of papers which Richard had handed over. "I'll call in such directors as I can reach handily and we'll examine your credentials. If you'll be so kind you may return at three o'clock this afternoon."

Richard bowed and turned toward the door.

"By the way," probed Mallon, "do these papers contain references from any responsible parties in this city?"

"No, sir! They relate to my capability as a forester. I can get character references for you, however."

"From persons in this city?"

"Not handily, I'm afraid, sir."

Mr. Mallon was playing the young man to the full length of the line, testing his endurance; it was essential, Mr. Mallon reflected, to ascertain just how close-mouthed and reliant this prospective emissary was. "A recommendation from some prominent man in town, preferably a man of financial standing, would appeal greatly to the directors, I'm sure. I'm favorably disposed but I'm not supreme. I think you should use all your resources."

But Richard had settled on his course and he stuck to his resolution. "I thank you for the hint, sir. I know it's valuable. But I'm unable to take advantage of it. I'll come for my answer at three, as you suggest."

President Mallon scratched the side of

his head and pondered after this rather intractable young chap had gone away. "He knows how to keep his mouth shut, all right. That's a good trait in an employee. If he doesn't talk *outside* the company, that's fine! But he may be just as stiff about talking *inside* the concern in the way of a general cleaning up of conditions. However, I'll give him a good word to the board, I think."

Richard returned immediately to Marion, making the most of his opportunity to be with her.

"You're truly stubborn," she told him, when he had reported on his interview. "But you'll have something to say to Uncle Weston, won't you, before you go to the woods?"

"Yes! After I land the job."

"I think he'll be a bit peevish because you didn't go to him first."

"I can stand that kind of peevishness, sis, dear. I can look him squarely in the eye. But if I had given him a chance to follow up his peevishness of the past with a twit about needing his help to boost me into a job,



I'm afraid he would have me looking at the floor. Now let's talk about jolly things!"

Impulsively, he picked her up in his arms and carried her out of doors into an arbor.

"Honestly, I don't feel natural in a house any more, sis! I hope I'll not get too completely wild in the north woods, if I go there."

"Oh, they'll give you the position, Dick. How can they help doing it? You're my perfectly grand big brother!"

"I wish you were an eminent financier. I'd carry your recommendation back this afternoon. We'd win with it!"

But Richard won without it.

At half-past three that afternoon, after serenely enduring cross-examination by the president and directors of the Telos, he was hired as forester.

Dixon came around the table and shook Richard's hand enthusiastically. The older directors seemed to think such extravagance was uncalled for.

"We want a lot of facts from the north,



strictly about our resources. You're going to supply them, aren't you?" demanded the representative of the new blood.

"I'll do my best, sir."

"How soon can you leave for the field?" asked Mallon.

"Very soon, sir, I think. My present employer has been very generous in all our relations."

"The sooner the better! Full instructions will be written out and ready for you when you come this way again. We hope you're going to be very valuable in what is a new departure for the Telos."

Dixon turned on his fellow directors the moment Richard closed the door behind him.

"We'll be put in a very silly position, gentlemen, unless something is done mighty quick."

"What do you mean?" President Mallon demanded on behalf of the surprised group.

"He'll naturally call on his uncle, now that the business is settled. The boy has made his own way, he feels, and it's something

which calls for a bit of crowing. I'm young, and I know how it is. Mr. Weston Hale has been offish about this forester business of young Richard's, so Mr. Todd has told us. It'll be strictly human nature for Uncle Weston to tell a proud young man about that telephone inquiry, eh? Uncle will be important in regard to his influence, we'll seem silly on account of our silence, youngster will feel a slap at his pride. It's a small matter, to be sure, but why take any chances on throwing a wrench into the cogs?"

"The point is well taken," agreed President Mallon. "Suppose you call Weston Hale on the telephone at once, Mr. Todd! Ask him, as a matter of policy, to allow the young man to think we knew nothing of the relationship when he was hired. Tell the uncle it's the unanimous wish of the directors."

Therefore, so it happened, when Richard reported to his uncle in the latter's office a little later, his belief in his unaided success was not disturbed. To be sure, the nephew

was conscious of some sort of reservation in the quizzical glances from the uncle; but Weston Hale had never endorsed wholeheartedly the forester business.

"I do think, Richard, the Telos needs some new light on its resources. Perhaps you can handle the job as well as anybody else. Anything I can do for you?"

"I think not, sir!" The nephew was mild but his pride showed.

"I congratulate you on being able to make your way with our board." Mr. Hale was a bit stiff, too. "However, in regard to John Batterson! I know something of his nature and his methods. Before investing in the company I took a trip into the north. I got on rather friendly terms with him. If you carry a letter from me it may smooth matters for you. Furthermore, I'll send off a letter to him today, saying you're coming. Now that you have secured the job, you can't afford to neglect any means of getting on well with it. You'll find Batterson a different proposition from the Telos directors. You understand!"

"Yes, sir! I'll be glad to have such a letter."

Therefore, when Richard was ready to leave for the north his credential aids were rather imposing.

He found no difficulty in severing his connection with the Craigmores estate; he was able to throw his job to a classmate who had no ambitions outside of "glorified gardening."

One day he kissed Marion good-bye and headed for the Big Woods of the North.

## CHAPTER IV

IN the dawn of a golden July morning Richard Hale awoke. He had slept at Rapa-cook Carry, on the north shore of the great Caribou waters.

He scrambled from his hard bed and pulled on his clothes—a new suit of corduroy. He laced his new boots. With his cap in his hand, he tiptoed down the tavern stairs, and in the pure joy of being alive, capered on the dewy turf that sloped down to the lake.

On the white pebbles of the narrow beach he knelt and splashed water over his face.

The great lake that stretched to the south had seemed weird and depressing when he had looked on it the evening before from the deck of the little steamer. One after the other, wooded headlands had notched themselves together behind him, as the steamer plowed on toward the north. They seemed to be shutting him off from the world that



he knew. Ahead lay only gray waters, the serried ranks of the "blackgrowth" crowding to the shore, and dim mountains that disputed the sky-line with the clouds.

Hale threw his arms above his head, breathed in the fragrance of the balsam forest, and rejoiced when he made out the nick in the woods where the tote-road leading north invited him toward his adventures.

Between the shore and the deep water a long pier crossed the shallows of the lake. On this pier the steamer had left the freight of the night before. Hale ran out over the echoing boards, and among the boxes and barrels found his new canoe, swathed in burlap.

With his knife he divested the canoe of its covering. The odor of new varnish was in his nostrils, and his eyes looked with pleasure on the shiny green canvas fresh from the painter, the ash thwarts, the cedar spreaders. He untied the paddles and tested them by balancing them one after the other in his hands—the long stern paddle of birch, the shorter bow paddle of ash. The setting-pole,

varnished gloriously and copper-tipped, answered his thrust against the boards of the wharf with a lithe spring. Then he lifted the canoe by its thwarts and slid it overboard. The little waves dancing along its smooth sides welcomed it to its element. He stepped down into it, knelt well forward of the stern seat in order to trim it, and paddled ashore. If there had been happier moments in his life, he did not remember them just then.

A short, stockily-built man, strolled down from the porch of the tavern to the beach, and looked with interest at the outfit when Hale gingerly drove the prow of the canoe upon the shingle.

"Brand-new and a slick one!" remarked the stranger.

Hale stepped over the side into the water, for he preferred to get his feet wet rather than to let the new paint be ground against the pebbles.

"Might as well get in a few digs at the start and initiate it right," suggested the on-

looker. "Canoes aren't made to store under a glass case."

"Perhaps not," the young man answered, "but I think I'll keep the rosettes off her as long as I can."

"If you're going to carry her up to the tote-team, I'll give you a hand."

They raised the canoe to their shoulders and marched to a great wagon in the stable-yard. Brackets extended from the side of the wagon.

"Might as well load her," suggested the stranger. They slid the canoe upon the brackets and lashed it with the ropes they found in the wagon.

Hale would have remained there to admire his new plaything if he had been alone, but the bystander stood grinning as he took in the general newness of the young man's outfit.

"Hurts 'em to be looked at too much when they're first out of the burlap. Apt to crack the body paint," he remarked, jocosely.

Hale turned away and retreated to the

porch of the tavern, a little nettled by the stranger's humor.

"How long are you going in for?" inquired the man, who had followed.

"I'll not come out till snow falls—perhaps not then."

"Whew! Health? No, can't be health. Say, if you want a guide, I can——"

"I don't want any guide. I am a forester for the Telos Company," Hale explained.

"Something new, isn't it? I mean new for them."

"I believe it is."

"I'm going in for the T. C. myself," said the stranger. "Cook, that's my line. But I'd rather have a guiding job, of course, and that's why I asked. So you're going a-caliper for the T. C.? I don't want to say anything against your line of work, but it's reckoned up here that this forestry business is mostly fuss and fub, spiced up with guesswork, and baked in a quick school-oven down-country."

Hale laughed.



"You know 'Hammerhead' Batterson, of course?" asked the cook.

"Mr. John P. Batterson? I don't know him personally. I only know he's the woods' boss for the Telos Company, and that I'm to report to him."

"Well, probably you'll be all right, if you have your orders all written out plain enough for him to read 'em. But I'd like to see any other man walk up to 'Hammerhead' Batterson and say, 'Excuse me, but I've come to hire out as a forester.' I've heard him pass remarks on nearly every kind of a complication, but the forester business would start him off with some brand new material."

Hale laughed again, but he felt a little irritated.

"My name is Doe," continued the stranger. "Most people laugh when I tell them that—cook by the name of Doe! It's——"

"It *is* queer," said Hale. "Now I'll have to see to my bags." He turned away, and busied himself in rearranging his possessions until the bell clanged for breakfast.



The dozen guests of the tavern, woodsmen who had been Hale's traveling companions on the lake steamer the day before, were at the tables.

"No, he tells me he's not," said Mr. Doe, in perfectly audible tones, as Hale passed to his place. "Says he's the new forester for the T. C. He's going in to explain to 'Hammerhead' Batterson how the old man needs a forester in his business!"

"Remarks made by 'Hammerhead' on the subject might be interesting if listened to with a little cotton in the ears," remarked another.

"So I was explaining to what's-his-name," said Doe.

The men fell into desultory discussion of Batterson's probable views on forestry. Hale felt that the manners of the woods were a little too free and easy. He was therefore not in an amiable mood when he threw his bags on the tote-wagon after breakfast. He strode off alone for the four-mile tramp across the carry.

But the first turn of the road took him out of sight of the woodsmen straggling behind, and his spirits at once improved. No one could look at smiling nature that day without smiling back. The earth was cool and damp under the trees. All the blissful savors of the forest swept across his nostrils on the balmy breeze, and the dim aisles to right and left were ringing with the lilting songs of birds. There was something thrilling in the thought that he was first on the road that morning. Each new vista was a delight. A doe and fawn faced him wild-eyed in the middle of the roadway. When they scampered away, a red squirrel scolded him volubly for intruding.

As he walked on, he realized that he was at last in the land of the totem of the hammerhead. He knew that that was the private mark of the Telos Company, the great syndicate of the north country. He saw it blazed here and there on wayside trees. A broken wagon, tilted in the gutter, displayed it. He had not known until that morning that John

P. Batterson, the "boss," was called "Hammerhead." It had rather a grim sound, that nickname.

But he was not troubling himself about any possible ogres in the north country.

## CHAPTER V

AT last the downward pitch of the road and the murmuring of waters warned Richard that he was approaching the end of the carry, and he came to the river almost before he had realized that the four miles were behind him.

Here the mark of the "Hammerhead" was more obtrusive. Piles of boxes showed it. It was painted on canvas that covered hay and bags of grain. *Bateaux* were branded with it, and he saw it on old logs stranded here and there on the shoals. The thought that he was now a part of the great corporation gave him a pleasant sense of importance. He sat down on a barrel and waited.

Doe appeared first.

"You are certainly some shakes at putting one foot before the other, young fellow," he remarked. "You got away before I noticed, and I've been trying to catch up."

Hale made no reply.

Doe promptly interpreted this silence. "I reckon you're a little fussed up at me," he said, meekly. "I forgot that city chaps are a mite stiff, and don't loosen up on first acquaintance as woods' fellows do. I didn't mean anything, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Hale is my name."

"Not a thing disrespectful to you, Mr. Hale. I just get to talking, you know. Everybody knows Pete Doe up this way—always grabbing in. Can't help it. I'm so willing to grab in to help a fellow that I forget, and grab in sometimes when I ain't wanted."

It was a sincere attempt at apology, and Hale's sourness vanished. He remembered the valiant way in which the little man had tugged in helping him with his canoe.

He therefore smiled cordially, and assured him that he was sorry if he had shown any crustiness.

Doe warmed under the smile, and proceeded to be as entertaining as he knew how.

He showed Hale the chief object of interest in the neighborhood, a gray and weather-



beaten human skull wedged into the crotch of an ancient ash-tree, and explained that it was the memorial of a river-driver who had been drowned on the rips, the dull rumble of which could be heard beyond the trees. He said that at least twenty other river-men had been drowned or crushed by logs in that dangerous part of the river, and narrated instances of death and hairbreadth escapes that fairly enthralled the listener.

When the tote-wagon rumbled down the hill, right in the middle of an exciting tale of adventure, Doe rushed off with Hale and helped him lift down the new canoe, which he handled as carefully as if it had been a fragile egg-shell.

After the duffel-bags had been loaded into the canoe, Doe stood on the bank, with a doleful expression on his face.

"I'm sorry I can't finish that last story, Mr. Hale—and I was leading up to one or two more specially good ones. But I see you're going. I want to say again that it's about as slick a canoe as ever kissed the water in these parts."

There was a hint in Doe's words and a distinct appeal in his eyes.

"How are you going to get up the river?" the young man asked.

"Oh, I'll have to go like the rest—in one of the bateaux," sighed the cook with another wistful glance at the canoe, "pole till my eyes bulge and row like pulling parsnips out of frozen ground! They're terrible things to get up-river in, Mr. Hale."

"As long as you and I are both going to Spectacle dam, what do you say to taking the bow paddle?"

Doe stepped in and pushed off before he trusted himself to reply. When they were in the stream, he dipped his paddle deep, and said, feelingly, "Mr. Hale, you saved me from asking you a cheeky question. I'm much obliged to you!"

The little man paid handsomely for his extra weight. He paddled the dead waters briskly; he knew the favoring eddies of the quick waters, and his fund of anecdote was inexhaustible.

At noon they landed on a breezy point,

and ate the luncheon that they had brought from the tavern.

"This shows what a span can do when they don't settle back into the breeching," said Doe, as he looked at his battered silver watch. "We'll be at Spectacle dam by the middle of the afternoon. The fellows behind in the bateaux are loaded to the gunwale with freight. They'll have to sleep out one night. 'Hammerhead' Batterson has got it down fine, hey?"

It was the first time during the trip that he had mentioned the Telos Company or its boss.

He continued: "'Hammerhead' has the main office send in his men in bunches, and makes them pole themselves up-river and bring along whatever freight is waiting at Skull-tree. Pay doesn't begin till the men are in camp. It saves a tidy figure by the end of the year. He doesn't hire any regular toters until the men are all in—and then there isn't much left to tote."

"That seems pretty small business for a big company like the Telos," said Hale.

"It might be—for the company! Maybe the toting is down on the bill that goes up to headquarters. Well, why shouldn't it be? The T. C. expects to pay for getting its supplies in. But when the money comes back this way—why, 'the autumn leaves are falling, Bonnie dear!'" Doe concluded with a wink.

"You don't mean to tell me that—that any one collects toting fees from the company and pockets them?"

"I don't mean to tell anything. People say I tell too much. But I'm gradually breaking myself of talking. Well, what do you say about starting?"

Hale wanted to ask more questions, but he disliked the idea of pumping Doe on a subject that was really no business of his. Accordingly, they paddled on in silence.

After a while Doe remarked, blandly, "Maybe it's all known at headquarters. Maybe it's an understood thing. Perhaps they think that while a man is greasing his own tin a little, he's frying a lot of fat for



his company. Excuse the cooking language, Mr. Hale."

"Do you mean that any man up here is stealing from the company?"

"I don't mean anything. I'm gradually breaking off talking. It busts out once in a while, though."

"Well, I'm interested," Hale said, frankly.

"Of course. I can see you would be. Fact is, I'm thinking this forester game is only a bluff," Mr. Doe declared. "The T. C. doesn't need a forester. A forester couldn't work with Batterson any more than vinegar is good flavoring for blanc-mange! I reckon the T. C. has put you up here to keep an eye on the game that's being played. Maybe you want to hire an assistant pecker who's about my size." Doe laid his paddle across the thwarts and turned a mild gaze of inquiry on the young man in the stern. "Make it better than cook's wages, and I'm with you!"

"Look here, are you hinting that I'm a spy?"



"I'm not hinting anything. But if you want a——"

The indignation with which Hale broke in on him silenced Doe, even if it did not convince him. He began to paddle again, doggedly, and for the rest of the trip wore an injured air.

The more Hale pondered the matter, the more unlikely did it seem that this garrulous busybody had any basis for his malicious hints. Doe was plainly a man with a grudge.

By mid-afternoon the July day had become oppressive. There was no breeze, the sun shone fiercely on the open stretches of the river, and blue-black clouds in the west thrust puffy thunder-heads above the tree-tops.

So Richard Hale's first glimpse of the settlement at Spectacle dam cheered him. The river had been shoal for the last half-mile; its yellow waters had fretted past bowlders and stirred hollow echoes in the woods on either side. Hale had labored at the setting-pole, and declined Doe's offer of

assistance. It was hard work; and he viewed the shabby cluster of little houses that marked the end of his day's journey with the satisfaction of a tired man who has put twenty-five miles of brisk paddling behind him since morning.

From several bateaux men were unloading freight on the beach below the dam. These were the boats that had started from Skull-tree the previous day. A dozen or fifteen men were at work carrying boxes and barrels up the river-bank.

After Hale, with the help of his companion, had disposed of the canoe high up on the shore, he shouldered his duffel-bags, and climbed the trail behind Doe to the company's boarding-house.

They came upon a scene of activity, and Hale set down his bags to look on.

Several men were at work, some heaping boxes and barrels together, others getting tarpaulin ready to cover them. One such mound of freight had already been erected, and the canvas had been stretched and pegged securely to the ground.

Barrels of kerosene had been rolled into a long trench, and toilers were busily shoveling dirt upon them. Doe told Hale that it was necessary to bury kerosene barrels in order to prevent the kerosene from evaporating.

A number of jumpers—sleds built with broad shoes for use on bare ground—were loaded, and their burdens were securely lashed; then powerful horses dragged the sleds up the gullied tote-road that wound away among the trees.

“Stacking the heavy stuff till it’s good slipping,” explained Doe. “But as fast as the woods teams are sent in, each one hauls enough general cargo to pay a profit on oats. And the little jinkus-bird sings as how the bills are all charged to the regular winter toting account! Twenty-five cents on every hundred pounds!”

It occurred to Hale that this gossip might be chattering in order to test a tender-foot’s gullibility, or in order to make trouble between the stockholders and Batterson for certain crafty reasons of his own.

"I really think you do talk too much, if you'll allow me to express a frank opinion," Hale said. "I'll merely ask you to be careful how you talk of my business up here. You understand perfectly well, don't you, Mr. Doe, that I'm a forester, and nothing but a forester?"

"That's what you told me," Doe admitted.

"I told you the truth. If your imagination has made me out a spy for the Telos Company I must warn you against letting that imagination work any longer."

Doe moved away a short distance.

"It surely was a sore place I poked you on," he said, with a wink that irritated Hale. "The way you jumped shows it. But if you want me to keep your secret, I'm the man to do it."

He went away, whistling, but turned suddenly, and cried, "There is Batterson over there, Mr. Hale! Better tell him you've arrived! He may want some special foresting done right now in a hurry!"



## CHAPTER VI

THE man at whom Doe pointed stood on the heap of freight that had been covered with the tarpaulin. From this vantage-point he was directing the work of the men who were bringing up the freight for the other pile. His language was profane, and every time he glanced over his shoulder at the rolling clouds, he became more vociferous.

Hale decided that this must be John P. Batterson, the big "boss" for the Telos Company.

Among the woodsmen, with their belted wool jackets of varied hues, he was an incongruous figure. He was tall and gaunt, wore a shiny and rumpled frock suit of black worsted, and, most singular touch of all, a white lawn tie that matched the roll of white beard under his chin. The rest of his face was smooth, and only the harsh lines that



pinched his mouth and his thin nose suggested the iron in his nature. Except for those lines and the language he was using at that moment, he might have seemed to the stranger the benevolent deacon of a country parish.

"That's Batterson," Doe informed the young man, cautiously. "Looks something like an elder, doesn't he? But he ain't one. Oh, no! A man who dresses like that wouldn't take a cent from the T. C., would he? Oh, no! I see you're standing here thinking of how to put that forestry business of yours up to him. Well, now is your chance. He's placed handy for you. Go out into the woods and cut battens and splice 'em to make a pole about half a mile long; then put the business up to him on the end of that! It will allow you start enough so that you can get away all safe!"

Hale picked up his bags, brushed past Doe, and went to the boarding-house.

Outside and in, it was a bare hulk. The big room had benches, or "deacon-seats," round the walls; the air was musty with the

smell of woolens that had been dried there winter after winter; the floor had been pitted by shoe calks until it was almost porous. Hale was glad that he was a forester, and had to stay only a short time in the place. The boarding-house keeper pointed out a closet in which he could stow his bags, and told him that the best accommodation he could have would be a bunk in the "ram-pasture," as the big room upstairs was called.

Hale sat down with as much patience as he could command, and waited.

The blue-black curtain of storm-clouds had been drawn across the sun, and in the gloom flared sharp flashes of lightning. The strident voice of the boss sounded above the rumble of the thunder. Hale could see him on the top of the pile, swinging his long arms, making sure that the last box was stowed and the last peg driven into the tarpaulin before the shower broke.

As the first fierce gust of the storm filled the air with light litter, the men came running toward the boarding-house. They had finished their work. They clattered into the

big room just as the rain began to come down in sheets. But Batterson, who followed, did not run.

"It won't hurt him to stay out, any more than it would a stone hitching-post," said one of the first arrivals, looking back at the boss. "And if lightning happened to be fool enough to hit him, it would have to quit business till it had a new point filed on its stinger!"

When Batterson came in, he took the only chair in the room; it had been left vacant as if it had been considered his by right. Without paying any attention to the talk of the men, the lashing of the rain against the windows, the hooting of the wind or the splitting cracks of the thunder, he drew out a notebook, and twisting his neck to get a good light, began to figure.

Hale reflected on what he had heard of the temper of Batterson, and decided that he would wait until the boss was alone before presenting himself and his letter.

But he happened to glance at Doe. The little man was grimacing in a manner that plainly said, "You don't dare to!" From

what he knew of that busybody, Hale at once became fearful that Doe would blurt out some awkward remark. He did not choose to be introduced to Batterson in any such backhanded manner. Furthermore, Doe's provoking grin put him on his mettle.

He walked across the room and accosted Batterson. "I'm Richard Hale," he said, when the boss stared up at him over his spectacles. "I think my uncle has already written in regard to me."

"I don't read more than half the letters I get," Batterson replied, sharply. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, here is a letter that my uncle asked me to hand to you in person. He said woods' mails were uncertain."

Batterson took the letter and glanced at the superscription carelessly. His whole air was indifferent almost to the point of insult.

"My uncle is Weston Hale, one of the stockholders of the Telos Company," continued Hale, and his tone showed that he expected to produce an impression.

"Well, what of it? Don't expect me to



hug and kiss you because your uncle owns stock in this company, do you?"

Loud laughter showed that the listeners appreciated the boss's humor.

"What's your business up here?" demanded Batterson.

"I've come to do forestry work for the company. Here are my credentials."

"Forestry! They'll be sending me book-agents and collectors for African missions and canvassers for ice-cream freezers next! What do you expect to do?"

The men laughed again.

"When you have time for an interview with me, Mr. Batterson, without making a joke of it, I'll tell you what I expect to do," Hale answered, sharply. "In the meantime will you please read that letter? Also my orders and credentials?"

He turned away and walked to the door. The shower had passed, and the air outside was cool and fragrant.

"Quite a wallop you hit him!" Doe whispered, as the young man passed him. "He ain't used to back talk."



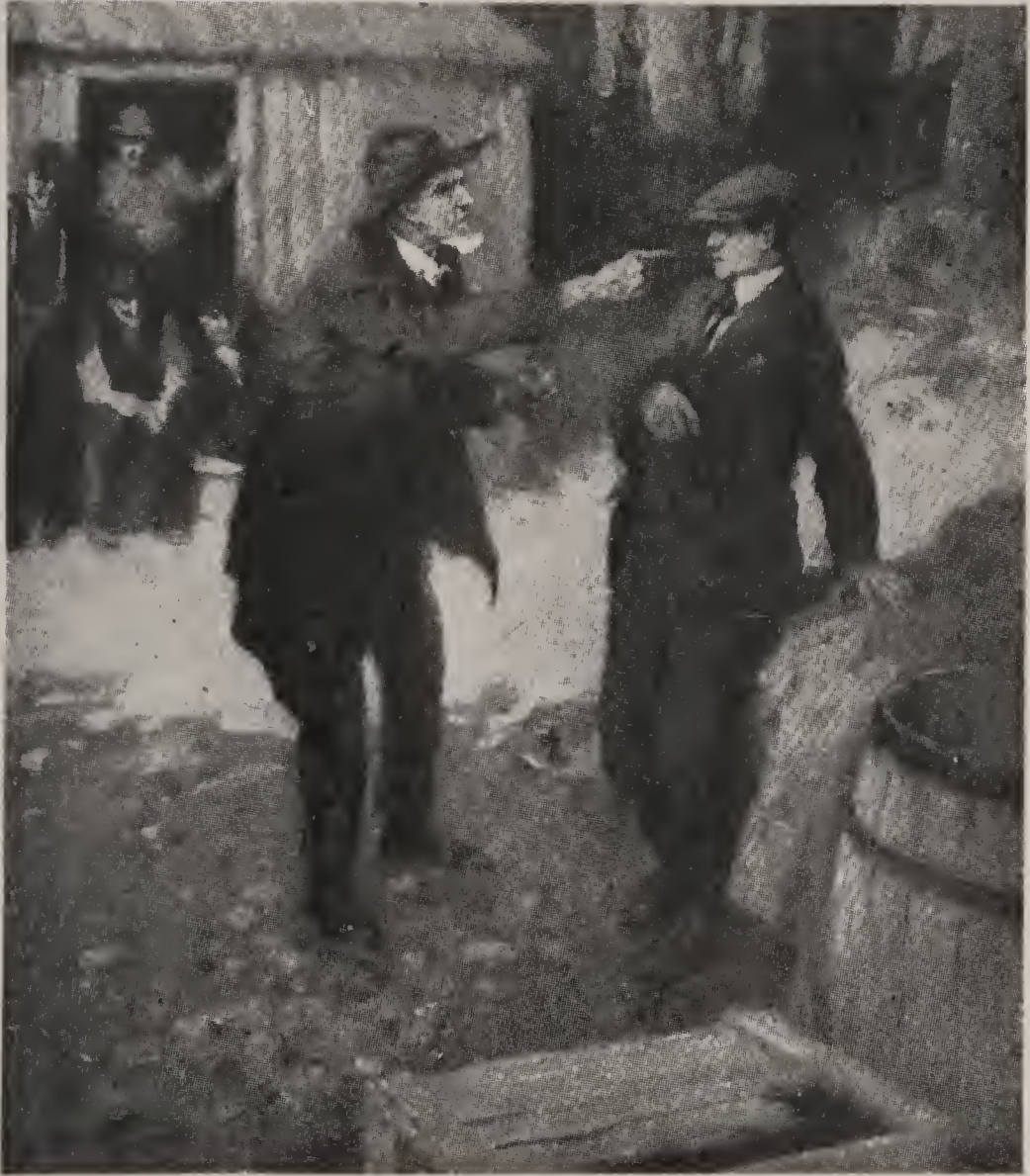
Hale took a long walk. He wished to be by himself and smooth his ruffled plumage.

He heard the sound of the boarding-house supper-bell as he was coming into the clearing on his return, and he took his place at table with the others. All paid strict attention to their plates.

Batterson was the first at table, and the first to leave. He devoured his food as hastily as he transacted all his other business.

When Hale appeared in the big room, Batterson caught his eye, and after several significant jerks of his head toward the door, he stamped out. Hale followed him—accepting the dumb show as an invitation. They walked over to a pile of freight and sat down on it.

“Young man,” Batterson began, “your uncle seems to have pull enough with the office to get you on the pay-roll of the T. C. as a forester. I don’t know what that means. Forestry for me means getting men and grub into the woods, and getting timber out and down to the sorting-boom ahead of the sum-



“SO THAT’S IT, IS IT? THEY’VE HAD THE IMPUDENCE  
TO PLASTER A SPY ON ME—AND YOU’RE THE SPY!”



mer low water. I haven't heard any hint from the company that I'm not fully capable of attending to that branch of forestry. I don't understand, do I, that you're up here to interfere with my end of the thing?"

"Certainly I'm not here to interfere with you," said the young man. "I did not use my uncle's 'pull,' as you call it. I explained my plans of work to the directors, and they thought favorably of the idea. Of course, it's largely experimental, but——"

"That's right, young man; what a green-horn like you can do here in these woods *would* be experiment!" broke in Batterson, with a sneering laugh.

"But it's experiment that means something, sir! The T. C. people know that there has been a great waste on their operations." Batterson leaped up.

He shook his long finger angrily under Hale's nose.

"So that's it, is it? They've had the impudence to plaster a spy on me—and you're the spy! And you sit there and tell me so!



I had you spotted all right, young man. But I didn't think you had the cheek to own up to it!"

"Own up to what?" demanded Hale. "I'm simply telling you what every one knows of lumbering operations in these days. I'm not criticizing you, Mr. Batterson. I'm talking of the old methods. I say that the right system isn't being used. Tracts are not thinned properly, trees are cut without any regard to leaving windbreaks, future growth is not——"

"That's your book twaddle—I know all about it!" broke in the boss. "But don't try to fool me about what you're up here for—I'm too old a bird! Waste, hey? Who is the man that dares accuse me of taking a dollar out of the T. C.? I'm saving money for 'em every year. There are lots of liars in these woods. I know 'em! They've been lugging down stories about me. Let's you and me have an understanding right at the start, young man. I've sweated and saved and slaved for the T. C. a good many years. Any time they don't want me they've only



got to say so. You can write that to your uncle, or to anybody else. But you'd better write 'em also that when they sent you here to spy on me you were undertaking too dangerous a job to stick to!"

Hale met the angry gaze as calmly as mingled astonishment and offended innocence would allow. Uncle Weston's well-meant efforts had hurt, not helped, so it now appeared.

"Hold on, sir!" he cried. "When you call me a spy you insult me. And why do you think the Telos Company would insult *you* by sending a spy here?"

Batterson blinked, and began to scratch the roll of his chin beard.

"I'm here on forestry work, ordered to report to you—and I've reported. No other matter concerns me. You have my credentials. I'm ready to take the field and attend strictly to the business I'm here for. If you don't put me into the field, I'll be obliged to find out the reason for it. I'll have to be a spy to that extent, at least!"

Batterson saw that he had not the ordinary

kind of "tenderfoot" to deal with. It was at once plain that he wished to retreat from a rather uncomfortable position.

"I reckon I've been a little hasty, Mr. Hale," he said. "But the business I'm in makes a man's disposition mighty touchy. I get used to barking at men. I forget sometimes. What do you want me to do for you—tell off some men to go with you?"

"Not till I am ready to begin detail work," said Hale. "I should like to put in considerable time on a general survey. If you are sending out explorers for regular work, I'll go along with them for the sake of having guides and company. I'll not interfere with them. I'll keep my work separate and independent."

"Nothing to object to in that," returned Batterson. "I'm starting two explorers tomorrow. You can go with them."

Hale went into the boarding-house and tucked himself into his bunk. The red had hardly faded from the western sky, but he had had a long and lively day.

## CHAPTER VII

RICHARD was up at dawn, fresh, clear-eyed, and hopeful once more.

When he entered the big room, he found that Doe had got up before him.

"I hear you're going a-calipering, all so bright and gay!" the cook exclaimed. But Hale was in no mood for chaff from his traveling companion of the day before.

"Mr. Doe, I have pretty good reason for believing that you have been spreading your ideas about my being a spy for the T. C. It is making trouble for me. What do you mean by letting your tongue run away with you in such fashion?"

"I reckon it's my one particular failing," confessed Doe.

"Yesterday you were just as ready to drop remarks to me in regard to Mr. Batterson's management of affairs for the company."

"Calling no names," insisted Doe. He

bridled somewhat, for Hale's eyes were accusing and expressed some disgust. "I ain't defending my sticking my nose in where it doesn't belong, but I reckoned it was about time for some one to do it in the interests of the T. C., and it struck me you might be the man. If you ain't the man, then no more need be said. But knowing what I know and expecting what I expect, your forester story sounded fishy. And if I'm any judge, it sounded just as fishy to John P. Batterson."

"I think the way he treated me before the crew last night was due wholly to the effect of your foolish gossip, Doe," replied Hale. "I haven't come up here to quarrel. I have business to attend to—my way to make in life. I know you don't want to hurt me. Probably you mean well enough—whatever it is you are trying to get at. But I'm not interested in anything between Mr. Batterson and the company. I've explained that to you carefully. Now will you keep your mouth closed about it?"

"So far as human nature will allow, it will



be closed," Doe said, without resentment. "I was only going to say that since you are starting away, I'll stow your canoe in the lean-to, and keep an eye on it. I'm ordered to stay here as cook."

Once more the little man's generosity banished Hale's ill humor.

"Let me tell you something," Doe added. "You're going into the woods with 'Straddler' Corrison and 'Sawed-off' Dumphy. Old Batterson has picked hot company for you! Look out for them! When it comes to hiking, one is a giraffe and the other is a fox—and both of 'em are built on the camel plan. They only eat when they can't think of anything else to do. Being a cook myself, I don't like that kind of disposition. I think that 'Hammerhead' has picked that pair so as to make you sick of your job. All I say is, you've got your work cut out for you."

Other men came into the room, and Doe ceased his confidences, but all through breakfast he gazed pityingly on Hale; now and then he shifted his glances to two men who sat side by side at one of the tables.



Hale followed the direction of the cook's glance. One of the men was strikingly tall, with a freckled face and red hair. His companion was short and slender; his bullet-shaped head was close-cropped, and his round eyes were set close to a nose that looked not unlike a parrot's beak. Doe's meaning was unmistakable. Those were the explorers.

After breakfast Batterson brought them to him in the yard of the boarding-house, and went away as soon as he had pronounced their names. It seemed to Hale that his new friends did not regard him with much favor.

"We're ready as soon as you be," said the tall man.

"But tell me how long we are to be gone, and what I shall carry for clothes and food," said Hale. "I'll be honest and say that a timber-cruising trip is new to me."

The tall man grinned down grimly upon the little one, who glanced quizzically up at him.

"As for clothes," said the tall man, "I've got mine on, and so has Pete. Here's my

grub." He patted a lump that was knotted into the end of a meal-sack—a lump not larger than a man's head. "Pete has got his stowed away in his pockets. We'll be gone two weeks, maybe."

"Two weeks, with no more food than that!"

"Oh, we'll fetch a T. C. lumber-camp here and there, part of the time. But I reckon it's as you say—you ain't used to timber-exploring. A man who lugged more than we've got would be laughed at!"

Hale stared at them and turned away. "I'll be with you in a few minutes," he said. In the big room he met Doe.

"Go out into the kitchen and put me up what I ought to carry in the way of grub," he pleaded. "I don't know anything about what I ought to take."

"The secret is in taking mighty little," Doe declared. "The way they go exploring in these woods would make old Doctor What's-his-name and his forty days' fast look like Thanksgiving. But I'll fix you out somehow."

Hale packed his knapsack from his duffel-bag.

"I wouldn't," Doe advised, when he returned with a package of food.

Hale, on his knees beside the bag, looked up at him.

"Looks as if you were packing for a season at the seashore, instead of an exploring trip with those two strammers out there," observed the cook.

"But I'm taking only a change of clean clothes and my toilet things. A man has to have those."

"Has he?" Doe exclaimed. "Look at those two! Starting off as they stand, as careless as a couple of bull moose! They wouldn't know what to do with clothes any more than a moose would—and they've been exploring a good many years. They don't have to have clean clothes and toilet articles. If you lug all that stuff, you won't have room for this grub, and you'll find grub handier than toilet articles."

Hale sighed, and jettisoned more cargo; before Doe's arrival he had already reduced

his first estimates by a half. When he had packed his scantily furnished bag and swung it on his back, he felt apprehensive; he was setting out into a roofless wilderness without almost everything that he was accustomed to think indispensable to bare existence.

Doe stood behind him and shook the bag to make sure that the contents were well settled.

"A bit too much of a load even now," he commented. "You're off with a pair who are tough on the hoof. Look out for 'em! I wouldn't wonder a mite if 'Hammerhead' had offered 'em extra pay for tuckering you. Look out for 'em! They ain't putting up any job to encourage foresters in these parts."

The two explorers started away when they saw Hale step from the door. With a few rapid strides he was at their heels, and the three swung into the forest.



## CHAPTER VIII

AS timber-explorers, headed for a distant tract of "black-growth," as the heavy timber is called, Elijah Corrison and Peter Dumphy plainly believed that their sole duty was to keep moving. Since Hale's duty took him to that same tract, it was incumbent upon him to keep up with them.

By dint of questions that he asked during the first few minutes of their journey, he found that the township to which they were bound lay several days' journey to the north. From the first, Doe's disheartening predictions that he would have "his work cut out for him" were fully realized.

Corrison was a rangy walker. He did not seem to hurry; he had the woodsman's slouchy swing, and seemed to let himself "fall along." The "tenderfoot" who tries to follow such a gait finds himself trotting half the time, and wondering how the man in front manages to get ahead so fast.



Dumphy pattered along with a hop and skip that took him over the ground with surprising speed. Hale, of sturdier bulk, found it impossible to imitate either of the men.

The first two miles led along low ground near the lake. Corduroy, or road made of logs laid side by side, alternated with rutted mud wallows, filled by the shower of the preceding afternoon. Corrison stalked across the logs and through the mud with the ease of a crane. Dumphy skimmed along with robin-like hops. Hale found it hard work. The logs were slippery, and in places were afloat. He tried to preserve his new boots from too thorough a baptism in mud, and his efforts tired him.

When the party came upon higher ground, Corrison led the way off the tote-road by a trail familiar to him. This tortuous traveling was even worse for Hale. The woods were wet. The stones underfoot were slippery. Bushes lashed his face when he stumbled, and twigs caught at the straps of his knapsack. The day was hot, and in the shade of the trees the air was humid. Perspiration

rained down his face, and black-flies, the pests of the summer woods, tormented him.

The two explorers strode along; they were hardened to the trail, and their feet were accustomed to the inequalities of the ground. The flies seemed unable to sting their leathery faces.

If you can take a forest trail leisurely, with inclination and time to search the woodland aisles for beauties of light and shade, you will find much delight. But the traveler who plunges through at the heels of men who are in a desperate hurry, finds desolate monotony in unending slope, ridge and valley.

The only stops were brief halts at brooks here and there. The men drank, and tramped on again.

Hale noticed that most of the time his companions were munching something, and that they constantly dipped their hands into their pockets. Toward noon, watching them eat made him hungry. He asked if it were not about time to stop for luncheon.

"Pete and I hardly ever hang up for noon-

in's," Corrison informed him. "We just stoke up on raisins and keep humping it."

"Is that what you've been eating—raisins?"

"Sure thing! Better than turkey and mince pie. I've been on a hike for a week, and haven't eaten much of anything else. Saves time, cooking, and wear and tear on your back. The more stuff you lug, the hungrier you get."

"Eat raisins on a trip, and peel off about twenty pounds of that beef you're lugging," suggested Dumphy, and he looked over his thin shoulder at Hale's stalwart figure. "Then you'll feel better fitted for this kind of work."

With new light on the customs of explorers in the north woods, Hale kept pace with his guides. He managed to slip off the straps of his knapsack, swing it before him, and dig out some hardbread; he lacked courage to ask these human steam-engines to stop and allow him to eat luncheon. He munched as he walked, and managed to dull some of the pangs of his hunger.

After Hale had studied "Straddler" Corri-

son for some time he modified his stiff-legged gait. He imitated the loose-jointed shamble and by setting his feet as nearly as he could in Corrison's footprints, soon found that walking was much easier.

But it seemed that the long afternoon would never end. His companions marched on until the sun was below the spruce ridges and the dusk had settled among the trees. Then they drank at a brook, found a spot where the ground was soft and thickly sprinkled with pine spills, and sat down with their backs against a tree. Corrison explored the depths of his sack, and produced a sort of sandwich. Dumphy found similar food in one of the bulging pockets of his jacket.

Hale posted himself under a tree near by, and dug into his own pack. He found cold meat to go with his hardbread, and began his frugal meal.

"Rather high living for a timber-explorer, hey?" said Dumphy to Corrison, as he gazed at Hale's cold meat.

The young man noticed then that their sandwiches had raw salt pork for filling.



"Don't you ever build a fire on these trips?" he asked. He had just discovered a little packet of tea in his kit.

"What do you want a fire for?" asked Dumphy. "To scare away witherlicks?"

"Well, for your pork, there, if for nothing else."

"You'd frizzle out half the goodness, would you? That's your idea of economy in the woods. Say, young fellow, your notions of eating are too high. You ought to have brought along a load of grub on a wheelbarrow!"

Hale did not reply. The topic of food did not seem to be a profitable one.

"Say, what is your job up here, anyway?" Corrison asked, after a time.

"Forestry," Hale answered.

"What is forestry?"

"When I get settled to my regular work, I shall select sample tracts, measure them, plot them, list the various trees and the state of growth, the soil and the natural advantages and disadvantages from the lumberman's point of view, and file the records for



comparison later. Then, from year to year, we can study the effects of thinning, of pruning—we can arrange to give spruces the shade they want and encourage the firs by sunlight and——”

“From year to year!” broke in Dumphy. “How long is it going to take you to get so that you will know what you’re doing?”

“Fifty years, perhaps,” said Hale. “That is to say, in order to lay out——”

Both men laughed.

“Fifty years!” cried Dumphy. “Why, Lige, in two weeks you and me can locate a season’s operation—on raisins, hardtack, and raw pork!”

“Yes, timber-cruisers can rush through the woods and show men where to slash and hack and slaughter whole tracts,” retorted Hale. “Perhaps they won’t even leave a windbreak or trees enough for reseeding. And where such men have lumbered, the tract is ruined land.”

“Well, they get the lumber off—and that’s what we’re up here for.”

“Yes, they get it off, and it stays off. Look

here, the Telos Company is logging for the big pulp-mills. The mills are down-river, built permanently on water-powers; there's a million dollars or more invested in each plant. You can't pick them up under your arm and set them down somewhere else when the timber is exhausted up here. They're not portable sawmills. It used to be just a head-long hunt for sawlogs, but from this time on we have got to look ahead. And fifty years is a short time when it's a matter of forest trees. It's a different matter from managing a vegetable-garden."

But Corrison and Dumphy yawned loudly, and with unmistakable significance. Then they pulled their hats over their eyes and settled themselves against the tree trunk.

"The man who put that into a book may think it's important," remarked Corrison, from under the edge of his hat. "But it hasn't anything to do with my business and Pete Dumphy's. Our business is to get forty winks and be up at daylight and on our way north to Township Twenty-seven. And if you propose to go along and keep up with

us,—whatever it is you're going in for I don't know,—you'd better get to sleep."

Corrison and Dumphy began to snore with a comfortable rhythm; they felt perfectly at home. But a sense of loneliness came over Hale, and kept his eyelids wide apart. For the first time in his life he was lying under the wide heavens. Instinctively he reached for the bed coverings as he lay down, and then realized that he had not even a blanket.

Three meals a day at table and a bed at night have become so much second nature with the human animal that in order to understand the part they play in life, a person must feel the shock of being without them.

When Richard Hale dozed at last, in spite of the thrustings of hidden roots beneath him, strange sounds brought him wide-awake. Rabbits scampered, and beat the ground impatiently near at hand. Queer wailings echoed from different points in the woods. A deer thrashed through a thicket, got the scent of the little group of men, stamped, whistled, and fled.

Hale understood most of the sounds, but that did not make them the less disquieting. The mystical spell of the night woods was over all; the forest seemed to be some living thing, some monster that sighed and breathed.

When he did sleep, it was with the prostration of weariness, and it required a vigorous shake by Corrison's none too gentle hand to waken him. He made his way to the brook, cramped, stiff and chilled, and was not himself until he had plunged his head into the cool water.

## CHAPTER IX

THE sun was not up, and the dawn was merely a red smear in the east when they were again on their way. That day was a repetition of the day before: trails, tote-roads, rocky hills, marshy wallows, and occasionally a mile or two of forest choked by the slash of a winter's wasteful lumbering. Tops of trees lay sprawled in every direction, and it was necessary to adopt the form of travel known in the woods as "hedgehogging"—dodging here and there, straddling prostrate trunks, and forcing a way through the littel of lopped branches. Corison and Dumphy plunged on through these cut-over tracts, keeping to the trail as close as they could in order to make a straight line of the march. But the toil of following these two hardened woodsmen was the most arduous Hale had ever engaged in.

He was not without the suspicion that they



were making it as hard as possible for him. Once or twice, after he had caught his foot and fallen heavily, he saw the flicker of a malicious grin. But although his feet seemed to weigh like lead and his muscles ached as he labored on, he kept up with them, with grim resolve in his face.

Late that afternoon they reached one of the Telos Company's camps. Hale ate his supper in almost a stupor of exhaustion, and tumbled into the bunk that the camp cook pointed out to him.

His tormenters were astir early, and he was on the trail with them at gray dawn. A drizzling rain-storm had set in. He had noticed before that there are men who do not seem to get wet when the rain pelts on them. Such were Dumphy and Corrison. As for himself, his clothes were soon soggy, and he was supremely miserable.

That day and the following night nearly exhausted his strength, although he would not admit that his courage was daunted. The shelter for the night was a dismantled horse "hovel," the only structure remaining out of

a set of camps. When he laughingly remarked that he expected nothing less than pneumonia and rheumatic fever to follow that night's experience, his companions scornfully assured him that if you remain in wet clothes until they dry, you never catch cold. They cited the case of river-drivers in the ice-water of April, and made some caustic comments on the nature of tenderfeet who growled about a warm shower in July. Then they went to sleep. For Hale it was a night of misery, intensified, if anything, by fitful slumber.

In spite of his conviction that his muscles were tied into hard knots, he was glad to be on the trail again the next morning. Even that racking labor was better than listening to the drip of cold rain and the snores of the iron men whom weather did not seem to affect.

There was peculiar loneliness in the experience he was having. After his one disastrous attempt at conversation, there had been no talk between him and his guides, except a few rather surly remarks. Corrison

and Dumphy did not even talk to each other. They munched their raisins, slept, and walked—walked like automatons.

On this third day they reached the edge of the timber tract that they had come to explore; the toil of travel was redoubled for Hale. The explorers abandoned the trails and thrust themselves straight into the heart of the forest. They threaded valleys, passed over rocks and roots, and through witch-hobble and moosewood. Here and there they blazed trees with their hatchets to mark the way for the swampers, the road-builders and the log-yards. They doomed virgin tracts to slaughter with vicious flicks of their weapons until Hale bethought himself that he was the accredited forester of the Telos Company, and burst out into protest.

That protest had been seething within him all the afternoon while he had followed them about. But Corrison and Dumphy had been too brisk and elusive to be cornered for a talk while they were at work.

It was at the evening meal, high on a ridge overlooking some of the best timber, that

Hale broke in on their calculations regarding the probable stumpage yield.

"I tell you," he cried, with a tired man's strained temper in his tones, "that tract is not going to be cut in any such fashion!"

The two looked at him. Then they stared at each other. Finally they exchanged winks.

"Let's see," drawled Corrison, "what was the remark?"

"I say that cleaning off land in the way you're planning to do, not leaving trees to bind the soil on these slopes, means that the township will not be worth ten cents after this season's operation. I'll not see the property of the Telos Company butchered in any such fashion. I wouldn't be earning my wages if I stood by and saw it done."

"Let's see," pursued Corrison, with the same satirical drawl, "who has been sent up here to locate the cuttings—you or us?"

"This system of lumbering, as you explorers practise it," said Hale, pricked to further anger by the sarcasm, "is robbing the company of good property every year, and as



forester, I don't propose to see it done. If you want the reasons why I'm sent up here, that's one of the reasons—to see that the future isn't sacrificed for the sake of one season's blundering operations.”

“John P. Batterson hinted that you had been sent up here to peek around and make trouble for sensible men,” said Dumphy. “And I see that John P. Batterson was right, as he most generally is. But let me tell you that me and Lige Corrison was exploring timber lands when you were lapping striped candy in the cradle. And we propose to keep on exploring timber lands, according to orders. And having our orders for the job we're on now, we'll inform you that if you get under our feet you'll get stepped on.”

“I'm giving you fair warning that I shall report this plan you are laying out, and shall tell the Telos people that you are wasting their property,” insisted Hale. “If I'm sent up here for anything, I'm sent here for that.”

“You'll be a nice, pleasant companion to have along—bothering men who have real



business to attend to, just as John P. Batterson told us you would be!" snarled Corrison.

Hale's anger overcame his prudence.

"After the way you have raged through these woods for the past few days," he cried, "and now from what you say of Batterson, I think my suspicions are about right! You got instructions either to tire me out and send me back sick of my job, to be reported as a quitter by Batterson, or else you were told to lose me!"

"A nice cry-baby we seem to have got plastered onto us, Lige," remarked Dumphy. "We'd better pull straws to see which one of us has to sit up with him to-night. This is a fine fix for a couple of busy men to be in."

They withdrew to a tree at a distance, and settled down for the night.

Hale was left with bitter thoughts that kept him long awake. He had come with the understanding that his work was to be experimental, but he had expected some consideration at the hands of the Telos field-workers. The open flouting of his coöperation indicated that he was mistaken. He be-

gan to wonder how long Batterson would persist in his opposition to modern forestry.

Hale saw plainly that he could not accomplish anything during this hit-or-miss scurrying through the woods. It was apparent that Corrison and Dumphy would pay no attention to any advice that he might give them. When at last his weariness of mind and body overcame him, he slept well, for the day had been hot after the rain, and the night was warm.

He slept too well. When he awoke, he was alone on the ridge. The sun was up, and there were no signs of his companions. But he did see a slip of paper—a page from a note-book—in a cleft twig that had been stuck in the ground at his feet. It read:

Your business don't seem to be in our line. Attend to your business now you're here and we'll attend to ours. And keep out from under our feet.

Yours respectfully,

Corrison and Dumphy

They had coolly abandoned him in the wilderness.

As best he could, he pondered on his situation. Corrison and Dumphy had taken him through country without trails or tote-roads. They had doubled and turned and crossed their track in the search for timber. He had followed without paying any attention to the course; he had directed his whole energy to keeping up with them.

## CHAPTER X

IN a vague way Hale knew that there were camps of the Telos Company somewhere in the region. But as there was no trail to show him in what direction lay a camp, he was helpless. His school field-work had made him sensible of the dangers that beset any one who becomes utterly lost in the woods.

Overcoming his dismay, he set his eyes on the sun, and resolved to keep his head, whatever happened. The wretches who had abandoned him had hinted at their defense in the note they had left. They could say that their orders were to put him on a timber tract. They could absolve themselves from blame by pointing out that a forester for the Telos Company should not require constant guardians.

In this wicked business Hale could see the hand of John P. Batterson. Plainly Batterson still believed that he was dealing with a

spy who threatened his position and his pocket-book.

Hale ate a frugal breakfast, swung his knapsack to his back, and started. His compass was of little use, for all directions were alike, so far as the existence of camps went. And on finding a camp lay his only hope.

He marked a distant depression among the trees, and took his course for that, in the hope that he might come upon a watercourse. In a lumbering region watercourses usually lead to tote-roads or to "ramdowns," and these, in turn, point the way to camps.

He was in a part of the country that seemed to have no trails. Its lack of streams had made it inaccessible to lumbermen until the demands of the forest butchers had compelled them to resort to such solitudes for standing timber.

Ten minutes after leaving the ridge, Hale was in the dim depths under the big trees; only the downward slope of the ground assured him that the way he was going must be the right way to the thread of water that might lead him out of the maze.



The watercourse that he finally reached led him to a pond, but the pond promised nothing. The woods crowded to the edge of the water. He had found no trails, and the stretch of shore that he could command from the end of the little promontory to which he worked his way through the undergrowth showed no sign of a clearing. His compass and the top tassels of the spruces pointed the way to the south, but he was not certain that the drainage of the basin led that way.

He ate a meager luncheon, sitting on a boulder that was lapped by the sparkling waves. But he was so lonely and worried that he did not enjoy the charm of the place. A meditative fox that strolled along a log across a near-by cove, and a mink that slipped past him, followed by her little ones, gave him a hint that in this spot human beings rarely intruded on nature.

Hale decided to follow the shore of the pond in search of an outlet. When he had walked half a mile, he saw something that startled him.

A man was seated on a fallen log, intent

on something that he held in his open hand. He was an elderly man. His clothes marked him unmistakably as a woodsman—not a sojourner, but a dweller in the woods.

He did not start when Hale walked up to him. He looked up in quite a matter-of-fact way, greeted the stranger, and glanced in the direction from which he had come.

“Guide coming with the packs, I reckon?” he said, after another look at the young man’s attire.

“I’m not a sportsman,” the young man replied. “I’m a forester for the Telos Company. I’m alone—that is, I’m alone now.”

He sat down on the log, near enough to examine what the man held in his hand. It was a small wooden box, with a hole in its side the size of a ten-cent piece.

“A bee tole,” the owner explained, when he became aware of his visitor’s interest. “The first chap has just been here and taken away his load. He’ll be back with a friend in a little while.”

Hale saw something that interested him still more. A small coil of cord was on the

log by the man's side. With slow jerks the cord was slipping off the coil, and was being drawn into a hole under the log.

"It's only Moses," said the man, smiling at Hale's astonished stare. "Might as well have two irons in the fire at once; that's the way I figure."

When Hale began to ask questions, the stranger set down his box, and pulling on the cord, drew it in slowly, hand over hand.

"I reckon I'll have Moses out of there. Our talk has made it too lively round here. They'd stay there and smother before they'd take chances outside. Another day will do just as well for me."

Hale watched the cavity from which the cord was issuing with little hitches. The object at the end proved to be a mud-turtle. One end of a piece of wire was twisted into a hole in the edge of the turtle's shell; at the other end was a little tin box, and from this smoke was curling through holes that had been punched in it.

"That's a smudge made of dry fungus," explained the owner of the turtle. "I hitch

it to Moses and start him into a fox hole, and if there are youngsters in there and everything is nice and quiet outside, why, pop goes the fox! A snare at the edge of the hole, and you have them! I reckon there are young foxes in this den. But I'll get 'em later. I've got an order from a man down-country for a pair. He wants them to put in his store window. They tell me that the folks crowd round to see them."

"I'm sorry I've bothered you," said Hale.

"You haven't bothered me. The way I'm fixed now I have plenty of time."

He sighed, and picked up his wooden box. A bee had alighted on it. Another was hovering, ready to alight.

"See the dust of flour on his leg?" asked the man. "I popped it on him when he was here before. Anise and sugar in the box—that's what toles them. He found a prize, and now he brings back a friend. That's the friend, the one without any flour. I suppose you know all about lining bees?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"Well, I watch the chap with flour on



him and time him on his trip. Get his line and work up on it, and time him again. When I think I'm pretty near the tree, I move to the right or the left, tole another bee, line him and find where the lines intersect—and there's your tree!"

When the bees had loaded up and gone, Hale and his new acquaintance followed the line of their flight.

"If you are not too busy," Hale said, when they were once more seated, waiting for the bees, "I'd like to hire you to guide me out of these woods. I'll confess frankly that I'm lost."

"I have time enough." The man's tone was somewhat doleful; there was a hint in it that he had more time than he needed. "If you've been in these woods any length of time you may have heard of me. My name is Leadbetter. But if any one has ever said anything to you about me, they've most likely called me 'Hard-Luck Anse.' I reckon I've earned the name all right!"

"I'm new up here; I have never heard of



you," Hale informed him. He looked at the man with fresh interest.

"Where do you want to go?" asked Leadbetter.

It was a question that made Hale view his predicament in a new light.

Where *did* he want to go?

Certainly not back to Spectacle dam, to meet the sneers of John P. Batterson! If Hale were to return without having accomplished anything, the report of his first week of forestry work for the Telos Company would not impress the directors with his fitness.

Yet what could he accomplish, dropped in those vast woods, without any knowledge of metes and bounds? He knew exactly what he could have done if the explorers had let him travel with them on their rounds. A little coöperation would have enabled him to carry out his plans. Leadbetter's question fairly "stumped" him. Where *did* he want to go?

He roused himself from his musing to find the eyes of the woodsman fixed on him

with kindly inquiry. Leadbetter seemed to realize that this strange young man was in trouble.

The impulses of youth are sudden, and moreover, Hale was alone in a strange country. He told his story, frankly and fully.

"Well," said Leadbetter, "I wouldn't have been surprised at a great deal worse from John Batterson; and what 'Straddler' Corri-son and 'Sawed-off' Dumphy did to you was as natural as it is for a bear to steal molasses. You let me run this thing over in my mind a few minutes."

He squinted to watch the flight of a bee that was just leaving the box with a fresh load, and then plodded on in the direction the insect had taken. Hale followed.

At last the old man pushed his way through a thick growth of young hackmatack, and came upon the huge hulk of a blasted pine. He walked round it, surveying it carefully, and then pointed high up on the rotting trunk. From a cleft in the tree bees were flinging themselves into the air—little pellets against the sky.

"This is it—I've struck it sooner than I thought I should. I won't trouble it now. Some wet day later, when a smudge won't be dangerous, I'll come with the old horse and a jumper. There'll be more honey than one man wants to lug, if I'm any judge of bee-trees."

He slipped the little box into his pocket, and tucked the patient turtle under his arm.

"You'd better come home with me, Mr. Hale," he said. "It's no use to hunt for Dumphy and Corrison. If you found them, that wouldn't help you. They don't propose to let you do your work. It's all understood between them and Batterson. My camp is up the pond a mile or so. You're welcome there until you can decide what to do. Meanwhile I'm thinking, too. I'm only Hard-Luck Anse, but perhaps I can be of help to you."

He slipped his hatchet out of his belt and blazed his way from the tree a precaution against the day when he should return.

After a half-hour's walk they came into a road that was hardly more than a trail, and

at the end, beside the pond, was Leadbetter's camp.

It was an "octagon" of small, peeled logs, built in painstaking fashion. Jig-saw scrolls decorated the eaves, and young, peeled spruces supported the porch; the small branches had been left on, and woven about the trunks. Every detail of the place spoke of loving care and patient toil.

"You like it, eh?" asked Leadbetter, pleased by his guest's admiring comments. "So do I, Mr. Hale. I've put in many a long day's work on it. Only some more of Anse Leadbetter's foolishness! A lot of time wasted, I suppose. But for a good many years I worked as well as I knew how for some one else, and I didn't get anywhere. And when I found out that honest work wasn't getting me anywhere, I came here and worked for myself. It's only fubbing, I suppose they'll say. But it made me happy while I was doing it."

"There's a lot of comfort in any work that a man does with all his heart!" cried Hale.

There was homely comfort everywhere



about this cozy corner in the big woods. Two cats dozed in the sun, an old white horse whinnied from the window of a log hovel, and there was a garden, enclosed to keep out wild animals. The pond came dancing almost to the door of the camp.

"If you want to earn your keep, Mr. Hale, you can take that pole, step out on the rock, and catch a few trout for our supper," said the host. "I don't have to go out of my own dooryard for trout."

Within ten minutes Hale had proved the truth of the boast. He cleaned the fish and carried them into the lean-to kitchen, where Leadbetter was nipping disks for biscuits from a generous piece of fresh-rolled dough.

The joy of living was once more springing up in the young man. Eager to help, he led the horse to the pond for his drink, stuffed the stove with wood, and finally sat down to supper with the most voracious appetite he had ever brought to a table. But even while he ate, his eyelids drooped. The relaxation that follows anxiety, struggle and hard work was upon him.



"Bed for you, sir, right now!" said the host, when they had finished supper. "There's your bunk. Make for it while you've still got life enough to take off your boots."

## CHAPTER XI

HALE went to sleep almost as soon as he closed his eyes. The next morning he lay for a few moments in the luxury of a half-doze, until the clink of dishes in the lean-to told him that his host was up and about.

He dressed slowly, puzzling over his situation. During breakfast he talked little; he was thinking, and Leadbetter respected his guest's meditations.

For a long time after breakfast the old man sat on the edge of the porch, looking out across the sparkling waters of the pond. He turned suddenly.

"You can't figure it to suit you, can you?"

"No, I can't," said Hale. "I can't accomplish anything by staying up here. I depended on those explorers, and did not bring plots of the T. C. tracts. I'm not even sure that the company has plots of these tracts."

"John P. Batterson doesn't believe in fur-

nishing ammunition of that kind to any one—not even to his company. And he has had the whole say of operations up here.”

“I wouldn’t get any satisfaction if I went back to him. He will probably make up some kind of story of my actions and send in a report to hurt me with the directors.”

“Of course he will. He doesn’t want you to succeed. His salary has depended on results, and he gets results by slaughtering the woods. I’m glad the T. C. is waking up, but——”

Another long silence ensued. The old man gazed thoughtfully out over the lake.

“Mr. Hale,” he said, at last, “the name I go by in the woods is Hard-Luck Anse Leadbetter. I started in as an independent operator. I had a few thousand dollars and a lot of courage. For two seasons I had my drive held up until the June drought hit me. I went broke. Then I took some popular contracts—minded my own business and worked as hard as I knew how. The same man who held up my log drive got a special act through the legislature, closing the

streams in this section to poplar pulp-wood, on the ground that it got water-logged and clogged the channel. By my system of rafting it didn't, but the legislature heard only one side of the case. No notice was served on me to be on hand and present my side. If I took railroad-sleeper contracts or cut poles for the telegraph lines, it was all the same! Something happened to me. One man did the figuring to make it happen. And that man was John P. Batterson."

"Doesn't he intend to let anybody else have a show in this section?"

"Only a few have had the courage—or folly—to try it. I've tried the hardest; and they call me Hard-Luck Leadbetter as a result."

"I can't understand why a man has such a disposition as Batterson. He can make money enough without having to ruin any one."

"The men who have the most are the ones who want to have it all. John P. Batterson wants this region for himself. As long as he has only his own slaves in here, he is able

to carry on his trickery for his own profit. It isn't a matter of square deal with him—it's one of dollars."

"Why haven't you been to the directors of the Telos Company? My uncle is one of the stockholders. I'm going to have a few words to say myself about John P. Batterson."

"With all due respect to you, Mr. Hale, you're too new a hand in woods matters to be able to prove a case against Batterson. It would simply mean that you'd lose your job."

"It doesn't seem to be much of a job."

Leadbetter broke the long silence that followed.

"I don't want to discourage you, or interfere with your work or your prospects with the Telos Company. But I know Batterson better than you know him. I know your position will never amount to much as long as he has anything to say about it. It isn't for his interest to have a forestry expert on the T. C. lands. Maybe the company will wake up some day. It's all dividends and present profits just now—and he is lying about the resources that are left. If there



was any other outlook for you, I wouldn't mention what I'm going to mention. But as matters stand, Mr. Hale, you won't lose much if nothing comes out of the trip I'm going to suggest to you. It only means a little of your time."

He hesitated.

"Tell me what it is," the young man said.

"No, I'll not explain now. You wouldn't go if I did. From John Batterson down, the opinion of people in these woods is that I'm only a useless crank. You found me fooling away my time. Now I'm going to ask you to take a walk with me. It's something of a walk—ten miles from here straight into the deep woods."

"Where do we go?" asked Hale.

"To Misery Gore."

"It doesn't sound very inviting."

"It goes well with my nickname. Will you go with me?"

There was something in Leadbetter's tones, and especially something in his wistfulness, that made Hale decide on the instant.

"I'll go," he said.

"Then we'll not waste any time in starting. You might change your mind." Leadbetter hurried off to begin preparations. He stuffed sacks with simple cooking utensils, with meal and pork, and sundries of the woodsman's kit. He brought out the horse and strapped the burdens on its back. On the top of the pack he put a neatly folded tent.

Their way took them north, along tote-roads for the first part of the journey, and then through the forest by paths that the old man followed unerringly. The stolid white horse had the sure-footedness of a deer, and their pace was a brisk one. They had covered more than three-quarters of the distance when they camped for the night near the inlet of a lake.

In the morning Leadbetter hurried breakfast with a boyish eagerness to be off.

The last stage of the journey was a climb up densely wooded terraces. Great spruces interlocked their branches overhead, and the aisles of the forest were dim, although the sun was bright.

Hale surveyed this magnificent growth

with the appreciative gaze of the forester. There were no signs of cuttings, none of the slash of the lower lands. It was virgin territory.

"I see you are keeping your eyes about you," Leadbetter remarked.

"If you had told me that such a timber tract was still left in this land of cut-and-slaughter, I'd have had hard work to believe you," Hale replied.

"The valley at the foot of this slope is dry. The men who have wanted to make money easily haven't bothered about a tract like this. That's one reason why it hasn't been cut. This is the township I mentioned—Misery Gore."

"How did it get that name?"

"It was named before I was born. And whoever named it must have known what was going to happen to me here."

He trudged on without explaining this remark.

After a time the hill became less steep, and at last they came upon a table-land at the top. Although the soil was thinner here,

the "blackgrowth," as lumbermen call the coniferous trees, was sturdy and well-set. From the edge of this table-land the ground sloped sharply downward; the brawling of waters sounded through the trees.

The stream leaped down in swift cascades, balked sullenly in basins, and roared through gorges. Along the bush-grown road that skirted it the old man led the way to the lower levels. Occasionally he drew Hale's attention to a rotting dam, and some other signs of an attempt to control the water for log-driving.

"It's White Horse Brook," said Leadbetter, "and I found her a bucking nag when I tried to saddle her a good many years ago. But I know her secret now—if only I had the chance—one more chance!"

A little before noon Leadbetter pitched camp. They had followed the riotous stream down until it moved more sedately along the lower levels. The old man unloaded the horse, and turned him loose to hunt for scattered patches of grass.

"Now, Mr. Hale," Leadbetter said, when



he had lighted the fire and had hung the tea-pail over it on a crotched stick, "you're probably wondering what all this is about. I wanted you to use your eyes. You have walked through a wonderful tract of timber. You have had a glimpse of the lay of the land. Now I suppose that in your studies you had to look into the lumbering end of forestry?"

"I think I understand the theory."

"From what you've seen, as you came along, you'd say, wouldn't you, that the outlook for the lumbering end was pretty wicked—timber on the wrong side of the slope, a dry valley that way, and this way a stream that's named 'Horse,' but that's more like a kangaroo?"

"It doesn't look very favorable, Mr. Leadbetter, to tell the truth."

"So the old-fashioned lumbermen have thought all these years," said the old man. "They have let it alone. And I'm only a crank, with a few dreams in my empty head. I lost part of my money trying to lumber



this tract. I lost the rest of it because John Batterson hit me the final blow just when I might have staggered through to success. Now that you've seen the tract, Mr. Hale, what I say to you about it will mean something. First, I want you to look at this."

From his wallet he took a yellowed paper, unfolded it, and passed it to Hale.

"That is a stumpage contract with the owners of Misery Gore. It was made years ago, when lumber was cheap, and this section so far from everything that it didn't seem as if the tract ever would be logged. That contract gives me an option on the tract during my life. Queer contract, hey? but the owners were glad to get anything out of the property—it came to them as a free gift—a Revolutionary soldier's grant. I paid them, as you'll see there, a certain sum every year to bind the contract, whether I lumbered or not. All the years I've kept that contract alive. It has been a hard task since John P. Batterson robbed me. I have gone without most of the things men enjoy. I

have lived like a hermit in the woods. I have worked for day's wages, chopping; I have lined bees, dug gum, hunted, trapped and guided. But I have been able to keep that contract alive."

## CHAPTER XII

“READ the names signed, Mr. Hale, please,” said Leadbetter.

“‘Jabez Wincapaw, Eben Wincapaw, Esther Wincapaw.’ And it is properly sealed and signed by witnesses.”

“It’s all binding and legal, Mr. Hale. Those are the Wincapaw heirs. They were poor people, and they were glad to have the sum I paid them. Only one is left—old Esther, almost ninety, and blind, and the money supports her.”

He put the paper back into his wallet.

“You have seen the land, and now you have seen what my rights are in it. And I’m telling you frankly that most lumbermen would say I’ve been paying out fool’s money all these years. I have gone to a few men with my scheme, and they have turned me down. So, you see, it’s a sort of a desperate appeal I’m making to you; but you are a young man with fresh ideas, and I’m hoping

that you can see a prospect where the old fellows have been blind.

"In the past years I have tramped every square foot of the Gore, back and forth. I have counted every tree on it. You know how the 'practical' fellows clean a tract, Mr. Hale. They begin at the top of the ridge and twitch down-hill, with horses, to the yards and the landings. Well, when Misery Gore is operated, the system will have to be applied wrong end to. You've got to begin at the bottom and twitch to the top of the slope, haul across the table-land, and drop into this valley. Now that's about as far as anybody has ever let me get with my statement of plans!"

"I know that the man who uses his head before he begins to use his muscle is the big winner in the end, Mr. Leadbetter," said Hale.

"My idea is to whip-lash a road on that slope, back and forth, back and forth, from the east to the west limits of the tract. It will climb the hill by less than a ten per-cent grade. Fifteen miles, or more, of it, and all

blazed and laid out. It will surprise you when you cruise the tract to see how little clearing will have to be done to let that road through. That's the advantage of virgin territory where there is no slash, and where the beech and ash haven't got a foothold."

"A fifteen-mile haul means a pretty stiff outlay for horse outfit," Hale suggested.

"Now you've put your finger on the trouble!" cried Leadbetter. "Old John P. Batterson himself hasn't horses enough to turn that trick. But right here, Mr. Hale, is where another fool comes in! I'm one fool. There's another. He is a blacksmith friend of mine. He has worked nights after his day at the forge was done; he has gone ragged and hungry to get money to put into the thing. And now that it's done, those practical fellows look at it and laugh. Well, it *is* comical to look at! I have laughed at its looks myself. It isn't a fancy machine like these up-to-date log-haulers the rich companies can afford to operate. But we have tested it, and it will do the work. It will haul 30,000 feet of logs at a trip on a five-



sled train. There isn't another like it in the world. It is a cross between a locomotive and a steam-roller. It lays down its own track as it goes along. Two men, working our tops and slash into fuel will feed it. There's the big idea! Poor men can run it. We can use waste stuff because of the boiler-plan. We can do two round trips a day with it, from the bottom of the slope. As we work nearer the top in our cutting, it will do better. It will do the work of fifty horses at a quarter of expense."

"I should think it would be easy enough to sell such a machine as that to any lumberman up here who is sensible."

"It will be easy enough to sell it to the independents who must figure fine on operating costs. They'll buy it after some fool like myself has tried it and made a success of it," Leadbetter replied.

He leaped up and began to stride to and fro.

"It has got to be tried before it will be taken up. If I can begin operations here this season, Stacy will put that log-hauler in on

Misery for a percentage on our cut, to be paid after our logs are sold. It will cost a few hundred dollars to pack it in here piecemeal on jumpers—and it's ours for the winter! You see Stacy's object, of course. A percentage that will yield him ten dollars a day will satisfy him, for he's looking to the future. I said I'd get those logs to the landing for a quarter of the expense that there'd be with horses. Why, we'd spend only what hay and oats would cost for horses—to say nothing of what we'd save on the teamsters!

“By this time you understand what I'm driving at.” He held out his hands, palms open. “I haven't a cent, Mr. Hale. I don't know whether you have any money or not. But I'm putting this thing up to you. Your uncle, ought to take some sort of interest in your success. Will he back you with ready cash. It won't take much. We'll need provisions, rigging and tools. I can find men in these woods who will work hard and take their pay when the logs are down. There are plenty of them who want to be out from under the hard fist of John Batterson. Your

uncle is a stockholder in the Telos Company. This operation isn't going to hurt that concern. There's room for any honest man to earn a living in these woods."

Hale was not prepared to answer. To switch from employment as a Telos Company forester to a partnership with "Hard-Luck" Leadbetter seemed rather a doubtful step.

"I'll be honest with you," said Leadbetter. "I don't want you to think I'm picking up the first young man who comes along and offering to take him into partnership. I need more than the money. I need the influence that will bring John Batterson up to the ring-bolt of a square deal. He ruined me years ago by using might instead of right, and holding up my drive in waters that are as much mine as his. There isn't much law up here after it's been filtered through all the trees between Misery Gore and the state-house! But John P. Batterson would think twice before he tried his tricks on the nephew of a T. C. stockholder. And if he tried the tricks, your uncle, I'll warrant, has the ear of the judges as well as Batterson."

"My uncle is a man of some influence in state matters," Hale acknowledged.

"Well, I've said it. I've told you my story. I've been honest with you. There is more to tell you later, in regard to the drive and the market, but I've said enough now. I don't expect any answer until you've thought it all over. I'm only going to ask you to be patient here a day or so, and cruise this township with me."

In the afternoon Leadbetter took the young man up and down the stream. He pointed out its defects and dangers, from the point of view of the river-driver.

"I built sluices here and there," he said, when they paused on a ledge that overlooked a boiling caldron of white water. "I had dams above to control the water as best I could. But when I turned on the water and started the logs down, the pitch was too steep. The sluices overflowed and the logs jumped the sides."

"I must say the stream seems to be as much of an untamed bronco as ever, Mr. Leadbetter," said Hale. "How can you expect



anything different when you try to drive it again?"

"Once more you put your finger on the trouble!" cried Leadbetter, who plainly relished the question. "Lining bees and fishing for foxes with a mud-turtle are jobs that give a man plenty of time for meditation. Mr. Hale, I've thought out a scheme for flumes and sluices that will make the White Horse as meek and mild as the old dobbin that tugged our duffel up here. I built those other sluices the way every one else had always built them. If Providence helps me again, through you or somebody else, I'll use logs and make the sides of the sluices of open cribwork. See? The overflow of water will gush out through the sides instead of over the top. The logs will stay in the runway. I'll show you my drawings and models later."

The solution was so simple that Hale laughed, even while he complimented the old man on the idea.



## CHAPTER XIII

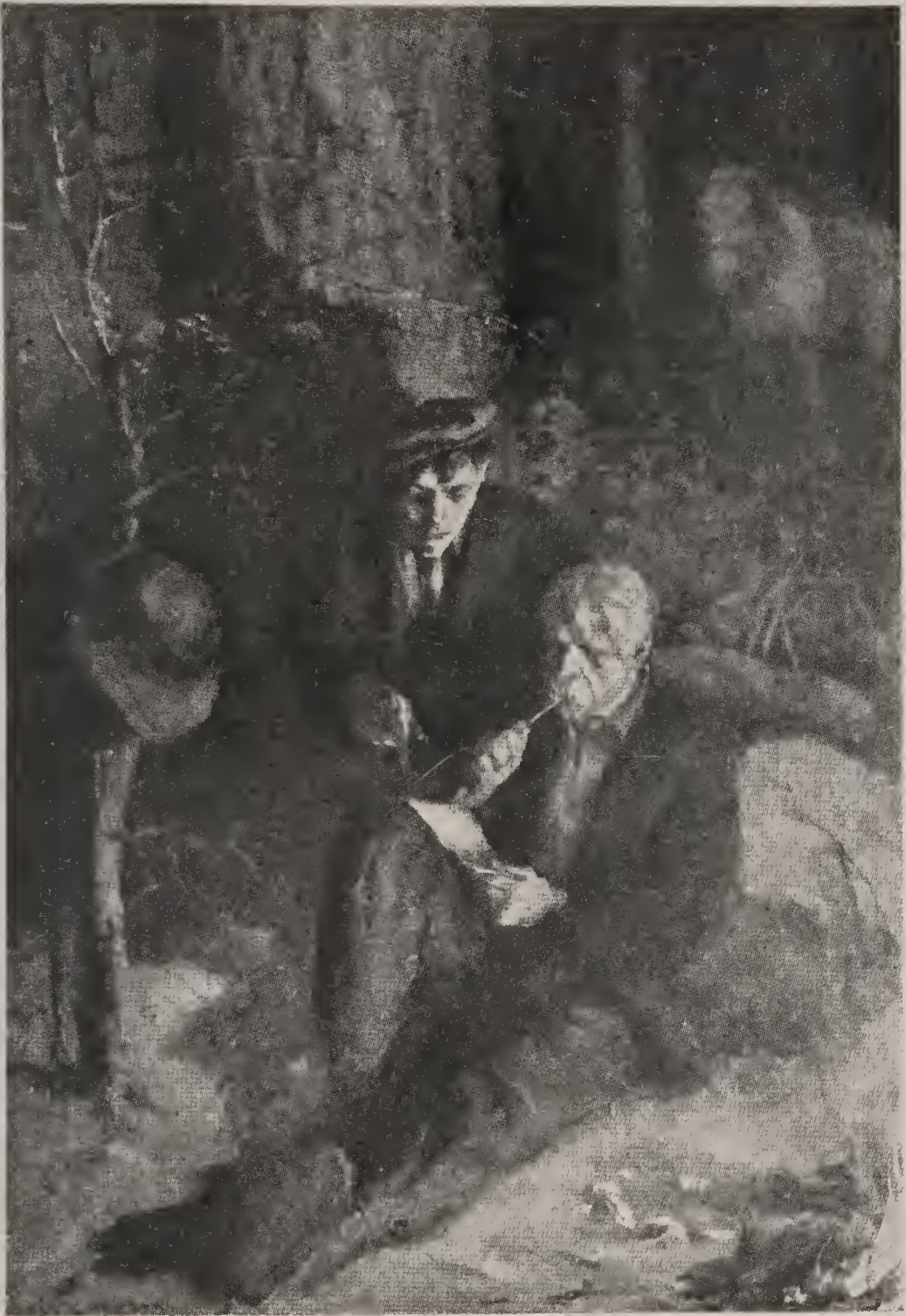
WHEN Richard Hale went to sleep that night, ambition struggled furiously with prudence in his mind. The struggle continued all the next day, while he followed Leadbetter over the magnificently wooded slopes of Misery. He saw the plan of the road that was to "whip-lash" up the hillside. Nature, with her terraces, had been beforehand in meeting the plans of man half-way. Such a road would traverse the tract so thoroughly from side to side and from end to end that all parts would be accessible. With a forester's perception, Hale saw even more possibilities in the tract than Leadbetter had seen. It would be easy to work it on scientific principles, to choose trees with strict regard to thinning, and to future growth and reseedling. It was a tract where skillful forestry would provide an abundant supply for cutting every year for an indefinite time.

Enthusiasm took possession of him. Was not this one of those opportunities which Jeff Gordon had painted in such bright colors?

The next morning he said, "Mr. Leadbetter, exactly what is your proposal to me?"

"Equal partnership. For my part, I'll turn in my stumpage contract, which represents the hard work and self-denial of years, I'll turn in my plans for work, and last of all, I'll work! You'll get the money for the outfit and the preliminary work. We'll sit down together and figure the thing out just as economically as we know how—and I do know how to get the most out of a dollar; I have had experience enough. You'll get your uncle interested enough to see that we have fair play on these waters. We'll pay back the money out of the first sums we get for our logs, and I'll share the interest charges with you. Then we'll divide profits, share and share alike."

"But about the money that you have paid for control of the stumpage contract?" asked Hale.



CROUCHED OVER THE LITTLE CAMP-FIRE, FIGURING  
ESTIMATES





"That has been my own tussle, and we'll let it remain that. This year, if we operate, the stumpage charges will come out of our common receipts. We'll give poor old Esther a fair share. She'll take what I think is right, and be glad to get it. I'll be honest with her."

"I think you are decidedly too liberal with me, Mr. Leadbetter," protested Hale.

"I'm only giving you the benefit of what I've done in the past for what you can do in the future. It's a fair exchange, and I'd like to get rid of that nickname of mine before I die!"

Hale took that day for himself. He went out alone, and cruised Misery Gore. He studied the trees, made his notes, and framed the case that he proposed to lay before his uncle. For he had decided. When he came to camp at night, he told Leadbetter his decision, and shook hands with him over the partnership. The two spent the evening crouched over the little camp-fire, figuring estimates by the scant light.

Early the next day, with Leadbetter as



his guide, Hale set forth on his return to Spectacle dam.

They made long stages, for Hale had become hardened to the fatigues of the forest trail, and his new partner was still a youth in point of endurance.

On the third day, when the sparkle of lake waters through the trees showed them that they were near the capital of "Hammerhead's" principality, they took leave of each other.

"I've grub enough to get me back to my own diggings," said Leadbetter. "I'll take no chances on going down into Batterson's hole, there. I'm in too happy a state of mind just now, Mr. Hale. I don't want the sight of him to spoil my happiness, for I'm hoping—hoping that you'll get what you're going for."

Hale watched him as he trudged away among the trees, leading his old horse; the sight brought a lump to his throat. The tragedy of a ruined life was expressed as much in the stoop of the man's shoulders as in the lines of his sad face.

He had that picture in his mind when he met John Batterson a little later in the yard of the boarding-house. With Leadbetter's case in mind, along with his own grudge, the young man returned the "boss's" stare with an expression that was hardly amiable.

"Well?" demanded Batterson, after Hale had glared at him for some moments.

"Change that to bad, Mr. Batterson. 'Bad' fits the whole business."

"Don't know but you're right! Lagging back on two of our best timber-cruisers when time is money with 'em—interfering in their work with a lot of forestry nonsense that some fool wrote down in a book for you!"

"We will not discuss the matter, Mr. Batterson. I know enough about you now to understand that it will be only a waste of time. I have my own plans from this time on."

Something in the young man's tone and air either pricked Batterson's curiosity or stirred his apprehension. He followed Hale toward the boarding-house.

"You want to be mighty careful what kind

of stories you send in to the company from here, young fellow, even if your uncle does happen to be a stockholder."

"Are you afraid I'll report that you started me out with two men who were told to run my legs off and then desert me?" said Hale, walking on and speaking over his shoulder.

"Desert you? Why, you ran away from my men—and they wasted two days hunting for you! There's the word of two good men against yours."

Hale pulled from his waistcoat pocket the note that he had found on the morning the explorers had left him. He flipped it under Batterson's nose and returned it to his pocket.

"I have their signatures to a note telling me to go my own way and keep out from under their feet."

"They — they — wrote that!" Batterson fairly shouted, and his face showed astonishment and rage.

By this time the two were close to the porch of the boarding-house. Dumphy and Corrison sat there, watching with sardonic grins the young man's approach.

"I got your little message when I woke," Hale said. "I thank you for it in person, seeing that you did not leave me any address."

"He lies. You two are fools, all right, but you didn't go and leave any writing for him to prove it by!" bellowed Batterson, red with anger.

But the expression on their faces convicted them. The boss knew that their dull malice had overreached itself. Hale walked into the house and left them to the fury of the enraged tyrant; he was delighted to hear Batterson warming to his subject.

His old friend Doe tiptoed out from the kitchen; his cook's apron was tucked up, his nose was white with flour.

"Ain't he just a plum, complete orator on the failings of mankind in general when he gets started?" Doe said, as he jerked his thumb in the direction of the raging boss. "And if you need any further proof of how they ran off and left you, call on me. They told me all about it when they got back yesterday."



"Put up two days' grub for me, will you, Doe? I'm going down-river."

"I don't blame you," said Doe. "Show 'em up to the big folks."

Doe could imagine only one cause for Hale's sudden departure.

He trotted on his errand, and brought the food before Hale had packed his duffel-bags. Doe had stored the new canoe carefully in the cook's lean-to, and he helped Hale to carry it and his other property to the river. All the time he kept advising Hale in an undertone to hand in a particularly red-hot report at headquarters. He kept his voice low out of fear of Batterson, who was tramping about the yard, eyeing these preparations with angry suspicion.

Hale had most of the afternoon before him for his trip down the river. He bade a cheery good-by to Doe, thrust his paddle into the water, and went bowling down the swift current. With the current to help him, he made camp that night, late in the evening, at Skull-tree "put-in." He slept under the edge of his canoe.



At daybreak he was stirring. He dragged his canoe far into the bushes and hid it, after the fashion of river voyagers in those parts. The duffel that he could not tote he stored carefully under the upturned craft. When he set out on his tramp across the carry to the lake and the steamboat wharf, his emotions were somewhat more mixed than when he had crossed earlier in the month.

As he marched on, his errand to his uncle seemed harder than when he parted from Leadbetter. After a futile beginning in his chosen profession, he was returning to his uncle with a story of failure, coupled with a proposal to abandon his work and enter upon a new business. He wondered how such a quick change of plan would appear to the man of hard-headed conservatism. For he not only wished to leave the employment of the Telos Company, but he intended to set up a business in opposition to it. And with whom? With a man of hopes and dreams whom the satirists of the woods had nicknamed "Hard-Luck" Leadbetter.

As he drew farther away from Leadbetter

and his rosy plans, and came nearer to the cold, practical business world outside the woods, he felt rather discouraged at the prospect.

Furthermore, was he not performing a most amazing face-about, he, the young man who had been so jealous regarding his independence? What had this new influence of the woods done to him? Had he gone half crazy along with Leadbetter?

Hale reached the city late in the evening, and spent the night at a hotel. The next morning he made himself as presentable as he could in his woods clothes, and went down to his uncle's office. The inquisitive glances that the clerks gave him did not help to put him at his ease.

His uncle met him with a look of astonishment that he did not try to hide. Hale plunged into his subject with such energy that his uncle did not attempt to interrupt him. The older man leaned back in his armchair. After he had heard the gist of his nephew's errand, blurted out in the first impetuous words, he ran his fingers through

his hair. Its ruffled state emphasized his air of astonishment.

When Hale had finished, he rose and started for the door. He had decided to try one of Leadbetter's methods that had worked well in his own case.

"I'm going to let you think the thing over, uncle. I've given you all the facts, and have stated them just as straight as I know how. I realize that you need a little time on it, even if you intend to say no."

His uncle did not call him back.

## CHAPTER XIV

AS Hale walked down the street, he tried to remember whether Mr. Weston Hale by any expression of his face had indicated sympathy. He had to own, regretfully, that astonishment and some bewilderment were the only emotions his uncle had displayed.

In a rather blue mood he began the rounds of the wholesale district, visiting grocers and outfitters, and asking for prices. It seemed a useless preliminary, but it was a task to dull the sharp edge of waiting.

At first, he put aside the thought of going to Marion at that juncture in his affairs. It would be necessary to explain why he was back again in the city; he did not want to disturb her with his own anxiety while he was waiting. He intended to return to his uncle in the afternoon.

Then, having plenty of time for reflection, he pondered on his uncle's well-known nature.

Weston Hale was cautious and methodical; he could not be jumped by headlong methods; he was quite apt to turn down anybody who came at him too forcefully. His resentment was more easily stirred than his interest.

Richard had left with him figures and a written outline of the Misery plans. The young man decided to give those figures plenty of time to burrow. They would not get very far under the skin while his uncle was distracted by the regular affairs of his busy day.

Then came the hankering to make a confidante of Marion, even at the risk of disturbing her serenity. Her sorrow if he kept her out of his affairs might be more acute than her worry as to the outcome, he pondered; her interest in all that concerned him had always been so lovingly vital and intense!

Therefore, he hurried out to the cottage and told her all, even confessing his early intention to keep everything from her until Weston Hale had decided.

"But you just couldn't grieve me like that,



Dick, keeping me in the dark. Your better nature wouldn't allow you! Own up!"

"No, sis! It came over me all of a sudden. So out I rushed. We'll worry together for a few hours, then I'll bring some good news back from Uncle Weston and we'll have a jollification. That's the fun of being partners."

"And I *am* your partner. That's true, isn't it?"

"In all things."

"Dick, tell me the story about Misery all over again. Make it all very clear."

He obeyed, his enthusiasm increasing as he noted her profound interest.

"You believe in it, don't you?" It was not mere query—it was assertion, proving her own belief.

"Yes! When I'm with Leadbetter—when I'm with you."

"Will you take woman's counsel? I have so little of my own to think about. I'm able to concentrate on another person's business."

"I'll thank you for any advice, sis!"

"In the first place, don't go back to Uncle

Weston today. We both know how he hates to be jumped at. He probably isn't back to normal even now."

"Fine advice! Accepted!"

"That gives us time to go over the matter thoroughly. We're partners, don't forget that," she insisted; her eyes were bright; she was quivering with suppressed excitement; she put a peculiar emphasis on her declaration. "Say so again, Dick."

"Yes, we're partners," he returned indulgently.

"What are we going to do if Uncle Weston doesn't see his way clear to help you?"

"I don't know."

"Dick Hale, I'm astonished! Is that all the woods have done for you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You're out hunting big game with only one bullet for your gun!"

"But really there's no one else in the wide world I can ask for money—no one except Uncle Weston; other men with money would laugh at me. At least, he knows my honesty and may be willing to bank on it."

"And if he doesn't do it you have no other resource?"

"I know of none."

"I do! As a partner! I repeat—as a partner," she cried, her tones a-tremble but her eyes very brave.

He searched those eyes with a long stare. "If what I suspect is true—if you dare—but don't you dare, Marion!"

"Don't you presume to browbeat a partner, simply on guesswork! We'll talk of something else now, if you please. The first session of partners mustn't break up in a quarrel."

When he went to sleep that night he consoled himself with hope; a man of means like his uncle, already interested in the north country timber proposition, even if his interest in a struggling nephew might not be especially acute, would undoubtedly be willing to combine the two interests and seek profit.

It was youth's naïve hope and he stuck to it; he knew well enough what sort of an alternative resource Marion was holding

back. He loved her the more for this added proof of her loyalty but he was truly shocked by the mere thought of acceptance.

Again, he persistently consoled himself with hope; he would win with his uncle; he would not be obliged to take issue with his sister regarding a most distressing question.

He was early at his uncle's office the next morning. Mr. Hale was dictating some business correspondence, and motioned him to a chair. Back in this atmosphere of cold practicality the prospect seemed more dismal than ever.

"Now, my boy," said the older man, when they were alone at last, "I know something about lumbering, but this scheme that you and your new friend have planned has an unheard-of quirk in every detail. Fresh ideas are all right in their way, but when you talk of logging up-hill, using a scrap-heap of an engine that no one has tried out, driving a stream that has already ruined an operator, experimenting in all this with some one else's money, you are hitting my business sense a staggering blow."



"I suppose so," said his nephew, dolefully. "It doesn't sound here as it seemed to me when I was in the woods."

"Then you have changed your mind about the prospects, Richard?" asked Mr. Hale.

"No, sir, not at all. I simply mean that I understand the difficulty of convincing you or any other business man."

"I have tried to get John Batterson on the Telos Company's telephone. They have a private line to Spectacle dam. But it seems that Batterson has his own ideas about a telephone. He has placed the box on a tree in the woods. He can call up headquarters, but he doesn't allow this end to bother him. He seems to carry things with a high hand, but the company has to accept him as he is, eccentricities and all. He is a valuable man in the woods. If I could have talked with Batterson, I could be more definite with you, Richard."

Hale hesitated. He had been discreetly silent about John Batterson. Now he decided to reveal something of his relations with the tyrant. "You wouldn't get much satis-



faction about me out of John Batterson. Batterson would have told you that I am a failure in the woods, and that Leadbetter is a lunatic. I may as well anticipate what he will say if you do get in touch with him."

He met his uncle's amazed stare bravely.

"I hadn't intended to cry baby about the forestry business I was sent on. But now that you have brought Batterson into the matter, I'm going to give you some facts."

He described how Batterson had received him, how he had sent him off into the woods with a couple of men who had frustrated all his attempts. He explained that he was now to all intent and purposes without occupation, and could accomplish nothing while Batterson was in full control of the company's field-work.

"Is the man mad?" exclaimed Mr. Hale.

"I don't know, but I'm giving you facts, uncle. The effect of Batterson's attitude, whatever his motive, was to put me out of commission."

"It's high time to find out the reasons for this performance."

"On the face of it, it looks as if I had become sick of my work, and wanted to try something else for a change. I don't want you to think that. I've just had to tell you the truth, at the risk of meddling in the affairs of the company. And it *is* the truth, no matter what face John Batterson may try to put on it. As to the other things they say about Batterson's dealings, it's none of my business, and I won't tell you anything about which I have no personal knowledge."

His uncle surveyed him thoughtfully and not with special favor. "An admirable stand, in some ways, but as long as you maintain it we're not getting full value out of you."

"As I have told you, sir, Batterson looked on me as a spy on his personal affairs; even your letter helped out that suspicion of his. Perhaps a new forester who hasn't any relatives in the Telos can get along better with the man. I'm ready to resign."

"Provided I back you in the Misery matter, eh? That's a discouraging name, Richard, Misery Gore!"

"The name was on the place before I saw it."

"I'm sorry you ever did see it, Richard. It has shunted you from your real job and——"

"But the matter of Batterson——"

"Can be attended to! He is only an employee and will not be allowed to interfere with the other men. In your case he has gone too far—your affair is the turning-point in his absolute domination in the north. But we'll talk of that later. Just now I must tell you I'll not back you in any independent operation. That's final! Please don't try to argue with me."

It was unexpected; it was like a blow in the face and the young man grew pale.

"Take it like a man, Richard! I have a business reason. I have other interests to consider. You have been out of touch with matters while you've been in the woods. Probably you have not heard of the sudden death of Director Sprague."

Richard shook his head; he could not command his tongue.

"I have been asked to fill the vacancy on the board and I intend to accept. Under such circumstances I can't consistently back anybody on an independent operation. According to your figures, you could undersell the Telos. It would never do for a Telos director to back even a minor rival who could affect the market. If I tried to turn such a trick—it might truly seem like one—using somebody in my own family, I'd probably have my associates in the Telos jumping on me as a knave. I'm sorry, boy! I'll have to give you my help in another direction. As one of the board, I'll see first of all that Battersen is tamed."

Richard, builder of hopes, had been high on his sanguine scaffolding. In this crash he was both dizzy and dumb. His uncle mistook the continued silence.

"This is no time for sulking, Richard."

"That isn't my frame of mind, not a bit of it, Uncle Weston," the nephew returned as bravely as he could. "But it was my first real chance, I felt, to pitch in on my own hook; naturally, I have been a good bit dis-



couraged as a hired man. But I hoped for too much—I asked for too much!”

“No, it’s all right for a young man to ask for capital when he stands ready to invest his own hands, his grit and his courage. However, in this case lender and borrower are tied up with a third party—the Telos. It’s too bad, in one way. But you must go back to your job. As to this man of the woods—his name is Leadbetter, is it?—I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll use my director’s influence and have the Telos pay him something for his lease. Fellows of his stripe don’t know what to do with too much money.”

“You’re making a wrong estimate of the man, sir.”

“Well, your estimate may be better because you know him. All right! Use your knowledge to your advantage. We’ll commission you to trade with Leadbetter. The sharper the dicker, the more you get.”

“I can’t do it, Uncle Weston.”

“It’ll be a mighty good stroke of business.”

“But I can’t go back to Mr. Leadbetter and propose such a thing as an agent for the



Telos, not after he has confided in me as he has. It would look as if I had used what I know to go over to the big concern and betray him. No, sir! I'll not do that."

"But your man Leadbetter will be glad to get hold of some easy money that way! He'll thank you for bridging the thing between the Telos and himself."

"Mr. Leadbetter is looking for something more than easy money, sir. He has invested in that Misery proposition a kind of capital money can't buy up."

The young advocate rose. He came out of the torpor which had followed the blow to his hopes. He was resolute, intense, inspired. "When a man has lived with what Leadbetter has lived in the north country, sir, he cannot be judged by money standards. He has invested his very soul in that thing. You, in the city here, can't estimate the matter. I'm telling you the truth, Uncle Weston, when I say that half my ambition in this case is to help Leadbetter put through what he has undertaken; I'm working for his peace of mind; I understand what success

means to him. I'm working for myself, too! I wouldn't be truthful if I didn't admit that. But I'm for him first. And I'll not betray him. I couldn't look him in the face and offer to buy his soul for money."

"Very nobly said!" declared the financier drily. "But it isn't business."

"Quite true, sir! So, I'll take the folly of youth out of a business office. It's in the way, here!"

"Just a moment, Richard! You're as hard to handle as I have found you to be in the past. You're going to report to Leadbetter, I presume?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Failure?"

"I suppose so, where my help is concerned."

"Once again, wouldn't it be well to propose the alternative?"

"And again I say I cannot propose it. He has been betrayed so many times! His nature has been warped. I repeat, I would seem like another betrayer, using the information he has given me. I have an affec-

tion for the man. I'd rather grieve him by my failure than have him believe I have added myself to the persecutors who have wrecked all his plans so far."

"Then you'll go back to your forestry work with the Telos, will you?"

Richard replied frankly out of his doubts. "I don't know, sir."

"You must decide by three o'clock tomorrow afternoon," said Mr. Hale firmly. "Though I'm not yet a director I'm going to ask the board to meet and consider this matter in order that my skirts may be clear. It's very annoying to have this relationship-twist snarl up my connection with the Telos right at this juncture," he added querulously. "I insist on common sense from now on. Present yourself before the board tomorrow at three."

"It must be understood that I'll engage in no more arguments about the Leadbetter case, sir! My mind is made up on that point."

"You may be ordered, as our agent, to report on the Misery tract and conduct nego-

tiations for a lease. If you refuse, the board may ask for your resignation. I'm not threatening, you understand. I'm taking no part except in furnishing information which has come my way. But you must be prepared for contingencies."

"Perhaps my best preparation will be to have my resignation written out and ready."

"I'd hate to see you discharged, Richard. It would hurt your prospects."

"I understand! I'll give 'em a chance to let me down easy."

Richard, on his way to a street car, passed some of the wholesale houses where he had asked for prices. The sight of them drove deeper the iron of hopeless defeat. Pity for poor old Leadbetter, waiting patiently and anxiously in the north, was keener than his own pain; youth has resources which old age has not.

Richard sought a refuge where he could get a new grip on himself; naturally, he fled to the understanding sympathy of his sister.



## CHAPTER XV

"I DON'T know just what a partner ought to do when the firm gets a setback," confessed Marion, after she had listened with eager attention. "But I don't feel a bit like lamenting and condoling, honestly I don't, Dick. I suppose I *should* feel that way!" However, there was dancing light in her eyes. Perhaps she had forestalled the cautious, critical judgment of Uncle Weston. "At any rate, if partners with rapped knuckles simply sat down and whimpered together there wouldn't be much done in the world, would there, brother?"

"I'm bucking up all right where my own interests are concerned, sis. But I almost want to cry when I think of poor old Leadbetter. He's sitting, watching the trail. A man in the woods doesn't have much to take his mind off his big trouble."

"I'm thinking of him, too. I can see him

right now! I can understand him from what you have told me about him."

"There's only one thing to do, of course! Go and tell him. And I'll feel like a whipped cur when I face him."

"No, there's another thing to do!"

"Not the Telos proposition! I'll not——"

"You're very dull today, Dick! But I suppose Uncle Weston's slap made your wits dizzy. You were more acute last evening when you warned me not to dare."

"I warn you today more emphatically!" He raised his tones indignantly.

"As a mere sister I might shrink. As a partner I insist on being heard."

"We'll put aside that partnership idea, if you please."

"I don't please, not to help you in breaking your solemn word to me, partner!" How insistent she was on that point of partnership!

He yelped an impatient ejaculation and rose to leave the room. But he could not win against her pertinacity in that fashion.

"Look you here, sir! Remember I'm a

Hale. I have plenty of the family grit. Once on a time, Mister Richard, you made me do exactly what you wanted me to do. I submitted. Turn about is fair play. This time you must 'cotton,' as the saying is. You must take our money—note what I call it—*our* money and make a success with it."

"Mistress Marion, never!"

"But you were perfectly willing to risk Uncle Weston's money. Is the scheme a questionable one? Are you afraid it's only a gamble? Are you that kind of a chap?"

"No, I believe in the proposition. But I won't take your money."

"*Our* money!"

"*Yours*, I say!"

"Are we getting anywhere, tossing 'our' and 'yours' at each other?" she queried blandly, not a bit intimidated by his manner.

"We'll get *nowhere* by continuing the topic. Better drop it," he advised grouchily.

"I've been thinking on it too long, Richard. I'll not drop it. Sit down, please. *Please!*"

He obeyed the tremor in her tones rather than the request.

Man to man is one thing! Man to woman is wholly another.

Marion had striven with him on the manly basis. She had other resources, so often effective. She employed them.

"I've never complained about the misfortune which has made me a shut-in, my brother. I've always had a smile and a gay word for you. But for myself, sitting here day after day, I've had only thoughts, mostly. My thoughts about you and your success! And these two, poor hands!" She spread them appealingly. "So idle, these hands! Not able to help you!"

"Don't, little sis! I can't endure it!" he choked.

"But you must listen to me, Dick. Do you mean to grieve me to the very depths of my heart and soul when you refuse to give me my only, my first real chance, to help you? To help myself, too, in the way of content and honest happiness? Will you go away, out into the busy world, where you can find so much to do and so many things to think about, and leave me here alone, sitting help-



less with my poor sorrow because you wouldn't allow me to do my little bit? I won't have a happy moment. You won't dare to let your thoughts run to me, Dick. Why, even what I'm thinking about that poor old man of the woods will spoil my days for me."

Tears were in her eyes, but the eyes were brighter than ever with eager appeal.

"Dick, think how happy every day will be when the sun rises and I wake and know you're busy, succeeding, because I have had my little part in your affairs! There! I'm done with pleading! But you have my true happiness in your keeping. I have absolute faith in your future. I'd rather have you to depend on, just you, than all the banks in the world. For the banks don't give devotion and love along with interest money. Oh, Dick, my brother, can't you see?"

Tears were in his eyes, too.

"I do see, sis! I'm going outdoors for a little while."

"Let's not have any more talk about the thing when you come back," she urged plain-

tively. "It has been distressing for both of us. Only say, when you come back, say only one word: 'Partner'!"

And he said it when he came back, taking her up into his arms and kissing her with the silent pledge of grateful love.

Now responsibility had become a fetish, a spell, a jealous god.

Failure was unthinkable.

Ambition had been a spur, to be sure. But this new motive for success put him into a veritable frenzy of determination.

Marion wanted to place everything in his hands, in absolute trust.

But he insisted on calling in the attorney who had served them in the past. Suitable papers of partnership were drawn up. Richard protected the partnership as much as he could with an insurance policy on his life, providing against the hazards of the woods and rivers.

He profitably spent the time until three o'clock of the afternoon set for his interview with the Telos directors: he bought supplies, paying cash, able at last in his courage and

hope to spend the money without the pangs which at first stung him. He came to a realizing sense of what this meant to Marion.

At the time appointed he was ushered in before the board.

"If you'll allow me, gentlemen, I'll speak first, saving time for you. I am resigning my position as forester. I have been able to finance an independent timber proposition; I'll operate with another man on my own account."

Weston Hale was present; the nephew swapped a disarming smile for a glare of amazement.

"Your mind is fully made up, is it?" asked the president.

"Yes, sir!"

"Do you operate in our region?"

"Not far from it. I'll be perfectly frank and say the tract is Misery Gore. I'm associated with Anson Leadbetter who has had rather poor luck there in past times. We see a way to handle the thing on new lines."

His face hardened; he tightened his lips in resolve.

"I feel I'm entitled to say something in my own behalf, gentlemen, even to the extent of criticising a man who stands high with your company. I found it impossible to coöperate with Field Manager Batterson. I was of no especial value to you while he took the attitude which he did."

"Have you any comments to make on his general system of managership?" inquired Mallon.

"No, sir! I speak only of my personal connection with him. And in that line allow me to say something more. Mr. Batterson has persistently balked and persecuted Leadbetter, so the latter says. I don't believe this board countenances such tactics."

"Can you be specific?" asked Director Dixon.

"Leadbetter states that for two consecutive years Batterson wilfully held up the Leadbetter logs on common waters; it spelled ruin for the man."

"The Telos company doesn't need to ruin the other fellow," announced Dixon. "If Batterson is running things in that fashion



we'll take a look into his system. You'll get fair play up there, Mr. Hale, have no fear about that! I'll say for myself I'm sorry you have found it necessary to resign." He rose and walked to the ex-forester, patted Richard's shoulder and gave him a firm handclasp. "The best o' luck and a top price when you get your logs into the sorting-boom!"

"Do you care to tell me where you have found your backing?" asked Weston Hale, overtaking his nephew in the corridor.

"I hope you'll pardon me if I don't tell you, sir."

"Perhaps I can guess. But no matter." He was still peevish. "I must say you've put me in a most infernal pickle as your uncle and a Telos director. I hope you realize your responsibility all 'round."

"So much so, sir, that it'll be dangerous for any man in the north country to stick out his foot to trip me. I hope Batterson can be controlled after this from headquarters."

"It will be attended to. I can do that much for you, my boy."

But Richard, pondering on the future, was not entirely assured.

He canvassed the matter with Marion that evening, taking her into his troubles as well as his hopes, making her wholly a partner.

"Those letters from Uncle Weston seemed to serve only as red rags, sis. The man is a mad bull when he is opposed. He's almost the last of the old tribe of smashers in the woods. He seems to think it's up to him to fend off new ideas just as long as possible. I'm afraid he can't be converted; he'll probably go down fighting."

"You'll fight back if he fights you?"

"I must do it. I've given a precious hostage to fortune, you know!" He lifted her hand and kissed it.

Two days later, his stock of money reduced to the point where only the best of luck and fine figuring would take the Misery project through, he started again for the north woods.

## CHAPTER XVI

BEFORE the lake steamers began to discharge his goods on the wharf at the carry, Richard had arranged for men and *bateaux* between Skulltree and Spectacle dam; and he appeared at Spectacle dam with the vanguard of his flotilla.

News of his enterprise had gone ahead of him. Batterson was at Spectacle, and from his own side of the river surveyed the scene of activity on the opposite bank, where Hale had pitched a temporary depot camp.

When the "boss" saw that the young man showed no sign of coming to him, he came to the young man.

Hale checked the first sneering questions.

"I'm not working for the Telos Company now, Mr. Batterson, and I have no information to give out about my private business. This place is mapped as the town landing in this township, and I'm on public ground, and tending strictly to my own affairs."

Two or three of the boatmen snickered, and Batterson, after a spirited monologue in an undertone, poled back.

Hale decided to stay with his supplies, as long as they were in the enemy's country. He sent a messenger through the woods to Leadbetter, telling him the good news.

He was uncertain about the route for supplies, after passing Spectacle dam, but his boatmen told him that boats could be used from there to the head of Telos and Spectacle lakes, twenty miles, and then by the inlet stream, which was navigable for some six miles farther. From there on to Misery he would have to pack the goods by tote-teams, for the upper streams were thoroughfares only for the log-drives in the driving season.

Hale camped beside his precious supplies; he received those that came up from Skull-tree, and forwarded them up the lake as fast as his *bateaux* became available.

On the second day Doe came, treading his way carefully along the string-piece of the dam. He was carrying a bulging meal-sack.



"Mr. Hale," he called, "if you want to hire the best cook between Skulltree and Telos headquarters,—and that takes in all the dough-slingers in these parts,—here's your man!"

"I don't want to hire men out from under Batterson, Doe. I'm not looking for trouble."

"I'm a free man," Doe declared. "I'm discharged—and there isn't any going back of that fact, for I discharged myself. I wouldn't work for John P. Batterson," he raised his voice at this point, "not if he'd swap gold pieces for every one of my biscuits. And now that I'm over here, on free ground, I'll say that any one else is a fool to work for him."

Batterson, on the opposite shore, could not help hearing, but he gave no sign.

"I need a cook," Hale answered, "and I know you are a good one. If you're done with the T. C. in earnest, I'll take you on. But I can't have you slurring past employers."

"There won't be any slurring," said Doe, and he slung off his meal-sack as a signal that he considered himself hired. "There's nō good in trying to slur him, because the human language hasn't enough words for the purpose."

Other volunteers followed Doe's example, but they took the precaution to sneak across the stream after dark.

Hale felt obliged to refuse to hire them. "It will seem like stealing his men, boys. I can't afford to have such a word go out."

"We know where you are going tō operate," said one of the men, "and we'll show up at Misery. It's a free country, and we'll be free men looking for work, and we'll have our bills ōf time to prove it to you. We don't ask you to promise now to hire us. But we shall come along and ask for work. We've worked for a slave-driver as long as we're going to."

Seeing that the question ōf the labor supply would not trouble him in his new venture, Hale felt his courage grow.

The arrival of Anson Leadbetter, radiant and excited by new hopes, cheered him still more.

"Perhaps you think I've been slow getting down here," he said, "but I took a run to the east, hunting up horses and teamsters. I've sent them in, and they'll begin toting our supplies the minute the first load hits the bank up there. And I've rushed in a crew to begin on the camps. You know I told you that I knew plenty of good men who were only waiting for a chance to pitch in with us."

"There are more across there when we need them," Hale said. He told Leadbetter of the visit he had had from the men.

Doe, with the guileless impudence that marked his actions, had placed himself so as to overhear what his new employers were saying.

"They all say I'm too fond of grabbing in, and probably it's so," he admitted. "But speaking of Batterson, don't go to advertising that you're fighting him. If you get him mad enough, he'll neglect his own business

to attend to yours. And he won't attend to your business in a way to make it healthy."

"Probably not, Doe," agreed Hale. "Each man for his own business—an excellent plan for every one."

"Well said, sir! I do grab in too much. But the intention is first-class."

With the knowledge that their tote-teams were waiting at headwaters for the supplies, Hale found enough to occupy his mind and time, and he put John Batterson out of his thoughts.

When he had sent up the last load, he launched his canoe and started out to join Leadbetter, who had been at the front for some days as commander of the forces on Misery. Doe went along as bow paddle.

John P. Batterson seemed to the little cook an ogre, who threatened the success of the enterprise.

"He'll 'goofer' you if he can," Doe declared over and over in the course of his rambling remarks. "Probably you've been wondering why. First, on the general principles of John P. Batterson. Misery Gore



will be a prime plum, when he gets round to pick it. He didn't put 'Hard-Luck' Anse down and out simply for the fun of it. Furthermore, Mr. Hale, you'll be going into the market with your logs, and you may upset the price per thousand feet in this section. And John P. Batterson has pushed lumbering figures to a basis where there's a mighty good drag for himself on settlement day."

"We'd better mind our own affairs, and let Batterson alone, Doe."

"Right! But the trouble will be he won't let you alone. I'm only going to say, because of my habit of grabbing in where I ain't wanted, that I'm quite a mouser. I can smell a snide game a long way off. I'd have hired out long ago as a detective, if they had only answered my letters when I applied for a job. I'm going to watch John P. Batterson from now on."

"I warn you again, Doe, that I'll like it better if you attend strictly to your pans and kettles."

"Oh, I'll do that, too! You needn't worry."

Richard Hale found the work at Misery Gore going on rapidly. Leadbetter knew his precious tract as a scholar knows his book. Years before, in his hours of solitude, he had planned every detail. He had learned every resource of the township. The depot camp was completed, and the first loads of supplies were stored in it. He had chosen as a site for the main camps a plateau close to a small brook in the bed of which there was plenty of moss for chinking the log walls. The sills of the main camps were down, and men were peeling logs for the buildings. Others were already nailing down hemlock poles for the floor of the living camp, and adzing them to give a level surface.

Doe installed himself in a structure made of huge sheets of spruce bark, and examined his new cook-stove with professional admiration. He informed all listeners that the fare on Misery Gore would include every woods delicacy, from blueberry biscuits up through the list.

In ten days the buildings were up, chinked and battened, and the men had filled their

bunks with "spruce feathers," and had set up housekeeping in earnest. The real work of logging began early in September, the time at which most woods crews get down to business.

The work of swamping the "whiplash" road up the terraces of Misery Gore was even less of a task than Leadbetter had expected. The big trees were felled to one side, and left for the days of snow and "good slipping." The small trees were used to bridge gullies and smooth rough spots.

During this period of preparation, Hale devoted himself to plotting the tract with chain and calipers.

There was to be no wholesale slaughter. He marked the trees destined for the ax, selecting them as carefully and methodically as he knew how, thinning with a scrupulous eye to future resources. There was such abundance that he was able to get most of his cut close to the road. That meant saving the expense of "twitch-teams" to haul logs to yards. In most cases the logs could be rolled directly on the sleds. It would merely be

necessary to "swamp" smaller trees out of the path and build skids at the foot of "ram-downs," as the slopes are called where trimmed logs are hauled to the main road.

In spite of Leadbetter's continued optimism about the untried log-hauler, Hale found himself worrying as he made his estimates for the amount of the cut.

The old man, who was unwilling to lose a moment from his dawn-to-dark duties on the Gore, had already sent a messenger to clinch the bargain for the machine. Stacy, the owner, was to send the contrivance in later, to be in readiness for the first snow.

"It will do the trick, Mr. Hale, I tell you it will do it," Leadbetter assured his partner. "You can depend on two round trips a day from the foot of the slope. In any case, if we can't just do it at the start, we can more than make up the average as soon as we get into the short hauls. Figure on four months of good slipping."

"Then we'll knock down 10,000,000 feet," said Hale. "If you are right about the log-hauler, it will do the business for us in one



hundred and seventy-five days at the outside, figuring only long trips. With the short trips to bring down the average, we can cut 10,000,000 and be well inside our capacity."

"My voice shouts for the 10,000,000 cut," declared the old man, stoutly. "Have you got that much staked out in your plotting?"

"Just about," said Hale. "And the noble old Gore can stand that cut without flinching a bit. In fact, she needs just that kind of a hair-cut. From a forestry point of view, it will leave her in better shape than ever. Down comes the timber, then! But, O Leadbetter, if old 'Susan Puffer' goes to work and fails us, after all!"

For a moment, the old man blinked, as if he were wondering who this unknown lady might be. "'Susan Puffer!' By gracious, you've named her, Mr. Hale! She only needed a name, and after you've heard her, you'll say that the name fits. Stacy has put everything he could think of on her except a name and a mortgage. He's been too busy making her to think of a name, and no one would let him have money on a mortgage."

Leadbetter sat back on the camp "deacon-seat" and laughed. "'Susan Puffer!' Yes, sir, you've named her!"

Leadbetter waited until the September frosts presaged snow before he took time for a trip down-country. He had two errands that only he could perform effectively. He wanted to complete the final arrangements with Ben Stacy about the log-hauler, and he desired to settle the matter of figures and terms with the aged survivor of the Wincapaw family; his blanket contract needed readjusting with the prices that would prevail when actual operations began.

He returned from his journey in a state of exultation.

"I guess they never can call me 'Hard-Luck' Anse any more, Mr. Hale," he declared. "Ben Stacy himself is coming in to operate Susan Puffer for us. When it came time to let her go, he couldn't part with her. He said he wasn't going to have any ordinary engineer monkeying round and discrediting his invention. He knows every grunt of the old machine, and when he's on the job

it means that she runs. He's got her apart, and she's on the way."

He drew a paper from his pocket and placed it in Hale's hands.

"But this is the best reading," he said, and his voice trembled. "What they say about bread cast on the waters comes true sometimes. I've always felt that I've been straight with the Wincapaws. I was paying them a lot of money for something that nobody else reckoned very high as an investment, but I didn't take any credit to myself for generosity. It was just business, as I told Aunt Esther the other day when she began on me. I had to check the old lady up short. She was piling it on too thick. I don't know how to act or what to say when any one gets to praising me. I never had such a tussle with an old lady."

"Did she take advantage of us, and run up the price?" asked his partner.

"No, it was worse than that. She wanted to throw business all overboard. She went on a great long rigmarole about how the money I had paid in had kept three old peo-

ple in comfort in their last years—just as if anybody else wouldn't have paid good money for the contract if they could have looked ahead the way I've done. She said that at ninety and over, she didn't need any more money than the yearly sum I'd been paying right along. She wanted to give us this stumpage contract for the same old price—and we taking off 10,000,000 feet! Why, I had to rise up and talk disgraceful to her!"

"I understand," said Hale, with feeling. "You can't fool me, good friend. You say that anybody else could have looked ahead and foreseen the profit here. Judging from what I know of the regular system up in these woods, any one who could have looked ahead and seen anything worth while here, would have robbed the old people."

"It has been straight business, just the same," insisted Leadbetter. "But the best I could do with the old lady is what you'll find in that paper. Neither the lawyer nor I could make her listen to reason. Look at it, and you'll see that we are to put a Wincapaw memorial window in the little village meet-



ing-house; we are to put in trust \$500 to keep the Wincapaw graveyard lot in good shape; and we must buy new hymn-books for the Sunday-school. For herself she won't take a cent more than the regular sum each year that I've been paying in. She stuck out, in spite of all I could say. Said that the rich can't enter the kingdom of heaven! Beats all how old people act when their minds are breaking down!"

"Now that I know Anson Leadbetter, I think I can put myself in Esther Wincapaw's place, and understand why she has shown these symptoms of lunacy," said Hale, smiling.

"Well, if a stumpage contract was ever let out on crazier terms than that," declared Leadbetter, tapping the paper, "it must have been back when Noah was in the ship-building business, that's all I have to say! The only consolation is that it's legal and binding."

"It seems to be all that." Hale had been examining the document.

"Over ninety! She's that old, eh!" mused Richard aloud.

"And still going strong! Any contract with her is a solid one, so the lawyer said. 'Sound mind and in command of all her faculties,' says he when he drew up the new papers. Guess I hadn't any right to joke about her breaking down."

"But life is uncertain—after ninety, my friend. How about her heirs?"

"She hasn't any."

"Then what happens to us if the old lady passes over? I hate to talk about death but we must consider the thing. This contract is for her lifetime, only."

Leadbetter continued serene. "We're all set!"

"She hasn't willed the Gore to us, has she?"

"Guess she would have done it if I hadn't been a little mite harsh with her. 'Esther,' says I, 'I've never been named in a will yet, and I don't want to be, as an heir. It might spoil my nature. I might find myself pro-

jicking on how long you'd live. You don't want to start up feelings like that in me, do you? And I reckon young Hale feels about as I do. Leave us hoping you'll live to be a thousand years old.' Then she called me names and made a pass at me with her cane."

There was flicker of fun in Leadbetter's eyes; he seemed to be highly amused by his thoughts; he was manifestly dragging out a pleasant topic, enjoying the young partner's mystification.

"Now I'll come to the point, lad. The old lady, listening to reason, has left the Gore as her estate and the church she belongs to is a trustee, forever and ever, amen. After she dies we pay the lease money to the church, five hundred a year towards the parson's wages, a yearly hundred for good story books for the Sunday school-lib'ry, two hundred for meeting-house paint and repairs. Eight hundred a year!"

"Why, that rental's so small it's ridiculous."

"I know it. But I couldn't make her raise the price. She said she didn't propose to

spoil her fellow Christians, lifting 'em up to be too proud by reason of having a lot of money; it was only right to make 'em scratch gravel to pay the rest of the church expenses, says she. So, as I figure it, we can take a lot of comfort whilst we're paying money to Esther; then later we'll be working to help religion. Can't always do that in a timber proposition. We're lucky!"

"I should say so," agreed Richard gleefully, catching the spirit of Leadbetter's humor.

Then Hale told his partner about Marion's insistent generosity.

"Beats all about wimmen folks! They're bound to have their own way!" declared Leadbetter, after he had listened; he wiped moisture from his eyes with the ball of his thumb. "We'd work hard, anyway. But all this makes the thing more binding."

"It makes the job on Misery a sacred trust! I told the Telos directors it would be dangerous business for anybody to get in our way up here. I said it so the word will be passed to John Batterson."



"It may set him where he belongs. It may start him rampaging still more!" A hard light came into the old man's eyes. "He'd better be careful. I'd do a lot for the sake of good wimmen when I wouldn't do it for myself."

"So would I! And now for The Big Job!"

"Just a minute! In some things Esther is sort of crazy, I'm afraid."

"You can understand how her mind is decaying from what I'm going to tell you next," Leadbetter continued. "An agent of John P. Batterson had been round to see her. Batterson offered her \$5,000 for this land, and agreed to smash my contract and stand all the law bills. And all she did was to make passes at the man with her cane. Language failed her."

Leadbetter put the paper in his wallet.

"Not a cent is to be paid until we get our pay for the logs next season. Partner, let's give three cheers, and get out on our jobs, as you say!"

Hale gave the cheers in his heart, and hurried away under the whispering trees of Misery. The chopping of distant axes and the "ur-r-rick, ur-raw," of cross-cut saws seemed the sweetest music he had ever heard.

## CHAPTER XVII

THE crowning sensation on Misery Gore was when "Susan Puffer" arrived. She came in a disintegrated form, huge hunks of iron, wheels, pulleys, gears, and sections of boiler strapped on "jumpers," pulled by sweating horses.

"Wonder what's the answer?" observed Doe, after a survey of the litter of hardware.

But with the engine came a creative spirit who professed that he could bring order out of this chaos. The creative spirit was Ben Stacy, a bow-legged little man, with a smooch of smut on his nose. When all parts had been deposited on a plateau near the camp, Stacy took his stand in the midst of them with confidence.

Hale watched operations from day to day with acute interest. He fully understood that the steam log-hauler was essential to success on Misery Gore. As he watched Stacy fuss-

ing over it, he decided that of all the fearfully and wonderfully made contrivances the world could offer, this engine surpassed everything. She was as uncouth as a steam road-roller, and had most of the characteristics of one. But under her splay wheels were jointed "treads" that she could pick up behind and lay down in front, making her own tracks as she progressed.

In spite of her cumbrous grotesqueness, she was solidly built, with plenty of boiler capacity, and she was geared in a fashion that made her a giantess in propelling power. But what would she do in actual work on the slopes of Misery?

The first real snow-storm of the season came in late October. It was damp, and packed itself hard under a final flurry of cold rain. Stacy now declared that the log-hauler was ready for her trial trip.

When the red fires were roaring in her breast and the breath of steam snorted in her nostrils, Stacy climbed to his seat in front of her stubby stack, where he managed the



throttle and guided the forward pilot-wheels by means of a tiller. The fireman was on a platform at the rear.

No human agency could have kept the men at work when Susan Puffer was preparing to start on her noisy pilgrimage along the terraces of Misery Gore. In fact, this journey was planned to be an excursion trip along the entire route that had been laid out for the log-hauler's winter operations.

Susan Puffer started. Steam hissed, pistons thrust, gears grumbled, and she heaved herself up from the snow-bed. She rumblingly dipped over the edge of the plateau, and the men flocked behind her, shouting their enthusiasm.

She traversed the little gully between the plateau and the end of the tote-road, gathering speed and planting her big wheel-feet securely. Steadily she tramped her way into the tote-road and halted, with the exhaust of her pump "suffling" gently and slowly.

"Hear her, gents," shouted Stacy, "breathing regular as an infant! She'll trundle every log of this winter's cut up the side of that

hill as easy as a baby juggles jackstraws. And if you want to see her paw gravel, hook on those sleds and pile aboard."

She hauled five sleds that first day, loaded with all the men who could stick on. The excursion was turned to practical advantage. Whenever Engineer Stacy discovered some hollow or hubble in the new road that tried Susan's powers too much, he halted her, and the men remedied the difficulty. Clankingly she laid down her own plank tramway, disdaining small inequalities of surface. Blasts from her stack shook the tossing fronds of the trees above her, and the echoes roared away down the forest's vaulted corridors.

Hale timed the trip; allowing for the halts, he found that Leadbetter's estimates had been right. By making the day a long one, with the help of pilot lanterns, Susan Puffer would be able to make two round trips if she were called upon to do so.

The next day she began her real work. Thirty thousand feet constituted her load, four men fitted slash and tops for her fodder,

and planted fuel depots at convenient distances.

As snowfall followed snowfall, and the road became packed harder under Susan Puffer's broad feet, she picked up her heels still more handily. There was no longer any doubt of her ability to land 10,000,000 feet of logs on the ice and the banks of the "White Horse," ready for the spring flood.

Soon the operation on Misery was moving smoothly; one day was like another, and all days were full of busy effort. Susan Puffer dominated the scene.

By means of their remarkable stumpage contract, by the possession of the horse-saving log-hauler, and on account of other elements of the situation, the partners would be able to meet any operator's prices, and cut under them. It was not that they were out to slash prices; they merely proposed to do business as independent operators who were making fair profits. They were sure of their figures; they had spent many long hours over them by lantern-light in the "wangan."

One day Jeff Gordon came over the hills,

riding on a one-seated "jumper" drawn by lively horses in a tandem hitch; with hoots, halloos, snatches of songs and snapping whip he made a great deal of noise along the forest aisles. He made more when he caught sight of Richard.

"I've been getting some pretty regular reports about your job here, Dick. Been intending to get around this way before, but I've a job of my own, you know. So you've got old Misery giggling at last, hey? You're the lad who has put the 'go' into Gore! Well, I'm the boy who is taking the 'con' out of congratulations! Great work, here, and I mean it! But this isn't a class reunion or merely a social call for tea. Come into the office camp with me, you and your partner, and let's peel bark on a little business."

Leadbetter was proud to meet one of the Gordons on such an amicable basis and he so declared heartily when he was introduced.

"What have you done about selling your cut?" Jeff demanded, going straight to the nub of his business.

"Nothing!" confessed Richard. "We had



to make sure of having something landed on driving waters, ready to sell. But now everything is moving well. It's only within a few days I have seen my way clear to run down to the city and offer the cut to some of the big fellows."

"Telos?"

"I've been a bit doubtful."

"It's your best bet. I'm hearing stories. All is not so well with those boys. Labor troubles, epidemic among the horses—and too much Batterson! Now tell me—and you know it's all safe! Have you figured your operating costs to the point where you know what you're talking about?"

"We have. We've put a lot of time on it. I'm perfectly willing—I'm glad, Jeff, to show you our figures."

He brought the papers in a locked box and young Gordon went over them carefully.

"Criminy! You certainly found an angel when it came to stumpage lease!"

"We did," affirmed Leadbetter.

"You have even shaded our costs and we own our tracts and have a wonderful genius

with modern notions at the head of things," cried Jeff, slapping his chest in order that there might be no mistake about the identity of the genius. "But I hope you're not going in to break the market."

"No! I don't mean to antagonize the Telos or any other of the large concerns."

"Good talk! Look here, Dick! Here's your chance to put the real double-cross onto John Pooh-bah Batterson—show him up with his employers for what he is—help all of us to eliminate such an element for good and all—pull up the old snag who's in the way of progress these days. You can afford to show these figures to the Telos folks if you deal with them. At the same time, tell 'em they'll find you a square dealer as to the general market. That fixes you with the big chaps. Then it's all up to Batterson! His own folks will spike him if he tries funny business on the drive. But why drive independent? I've brought an offer. Dad is with me in it. Join drives with us!"

"It's too much to ask!"

Jeff grinned. "If you think I'm taking

you in as a charity patient, you're all wrong, Dick. No free gifts up in these woods! All business! I'm asking something for the Gordons. You stand well with the Telos folks, and I know it. They believe in your honesty even if they did think you were misguided when you jacked your job. Your uncle is a director."

"But I'm afraid he doesn't favor me very much."

"Get out! He's proud of you by this time. You're his own kind, his own blood. It's a good string and you've got to pull on it. If we join drives on logs, you've got to join drives on a sale deal. Will you?"

"I'll do it, Jeff."

"Go and trade with the Telos for the two cuts—make one deal of it. Sign a contract to deliver thirty millions—yours and ours. Dad and I will go good on the bond. Have you money enough to see you through?"

Richard and Leadbetter swapped glances. The money matter had been bothering them. No amount of advance figuring could take care of the uncertainties of woods' opera-

tions when, as on Misery, new and untried conditions were involved. Marion's dollars and Richard's savings had been thriftily spent but the outlay had been more than the partners had anticipated; men had been obliged to ask for advances on account of unexpected family needs; fresh supplies and extra gear had been called for; the new firm had no rating and was obliged to pay cash.

"I see you haven't!" blurted the blunt Jeff. "The Gordons will make a cash advance on your cut as it lies. That spells hustle for you, Dick!"

"I hate to take it! It injects the element of friendship and makes the responsibility tremendous, Jeff. It's bad enough as it is. I'll be frank. My sister handed over to me all her money—I told you about that money one day at Craigmores."

"Good enough! She has faith in your honest ability, Dick, just as I have. Now what you have to do is to spread yourself to the best of your ability and sell something to the Telos folks. Frankly, the Gordons can do better through another party like



yourself. The old grudges persist up here in the woods. By offering one bite at the apple the thing can be put through much better for all hands. And the general combination will remove the last element of fight on the waters. I want to see what will happen to Batterson in the new deal. Good rivermen are afraid of the key-log which starts a jam; I've always been afraid of Batterson. Here's your chance. Do you take it?"

"I do! I start for town in the morning."

## CHAPTER XVIII

HALE hurried to his uncle's office first of all, and found an interested listener.

"Thirty million feet for the market, hey?" cried his uncle. "Well, my boy, I know where your market will be. The Telos Company will take the combined cut. We need those logs. It is indiscreet to reveal our affairs to a rival operator," he continued, with a smile, "but we have met several little setbacks on our own lands. Batterson has been having a great amount of labor troubles. He has sent down some particularly bitter reports about your interference with his crew."

"I most emphatically plead not guilty, sir. Leadbetter had most of our men hired early from among his friends. I have taken on a few men who came to us, but they were free to hire. Batterson is a tyrant and a slave-driver, and men will not stay with him."

Hale knew more about the inside affairs of

the Telos Company logging department than he felt disposed to tell his uncle just then. He had met talkative men on the way down, and he knew that the principal cause of complaint on the Telos operations was that the men were half-starved. These persons said that Batterson was drawing plenty of provisions from his employers, but that his greed for money had gone to greater lengths than ever, and that he was selling these provisions and pocketing the money.

"It has been a hard winter for us," Mr. Weston Hale said. "Some kind of an epidemic got among our horses, and we haven't more than half the usual amount of logs on the landings—so our scalers report.

"I've urged an investigation for some weeks. Now I shall move in the matter myself. And the question I shall ask Batterson is why two new men can come to us with a price on their logs more than ten per cent. lower than logs are costing us from our own lands. And you are allowing for a snug profit!"

"Our stumpage——"

"It's a point in your favor, of course—but it does not explain the discrepancy, for we own our lands. Furthermore, so you tell me, the Gordons are able to trail with you on prices. I don't want to embroil you in trouble with our boss up there, but now that you have quoted prices, it becomes a strictly business matter. And I have learned a few other things that I should like to have Batterson explain to me as a stockholder. He has been told to attend the annual meeting next month."

Hale heard this with the liveliest interest.

"Of course this is between us as uncle and nephew," Mr. Hale went on. "As a partner in the Misery Gore operation, you will please forget what I have said."

"I am quite anxious to keep out of any possible trouble with John Batterson," answered Hale, "and to keep his business as far from mine as I can. If the company will take our logs, I'll hurry back to my work. There's plenty of it waiting for me."

"Some stockholders think that the old board has left too much to Batterson. We're



going to have a reorganization. You need have no fear—we'll take your logs."

Hale made quick time on his return journey to Misery. The roads over the frozen waters were smooth, and the crisp chirp of the runners of his jumper and the jingle of the harness-bells were in tune with his lively thoughts.

The tote-roads were now in prime winter condition. An hour after dark on the first day's journey north, Hale swung into the yard of the Half-Way House with the comfortable feeling that he would be on his own logging-grounds at a seasonable hour the next afternoon.

The Half-Way House was a woods hostelry for the winter wayfarers to and from the timber tracts. It had its usual crowd of overnight guests. Supper was under way when he arrived, and he found a place at the long table. As he took his first potatoes from the heaped dish in front of him, he glanced up the line of wagging chins toward the head of the table. There, like a baron, presiding at the feast, sat John P. Batterson, gazing

malevolently at him. Every time he glanced that way, as he ate, he met the same basilisk stare.

Hale was at the table after the others had straggled out to the general room. When he went out in his turn, he found Batterson posted near the door to the dining-room, with his legs set well apart, a scowl on his forehead, and a toothpick set in the corner of his mouth.

"Just up from down-country, hey?" said the "boss." He did not moderate his rough tones, and at once the buzz of the men's voices in the big room ceased.

"I have been down to the city for a few days," answered Hale.

"I don't need your word for it. I knew you had been there by the kind of talk I got over the telephone this morning. I knew the spy had been there with his budget. You've done plenty of talking behind my back down there. Any sneak can do that, to hurt a man with those who hire him. But now you're up here, man to man! Talk to my face, you stockholder's pet, you!"

The listeners had formed in a circle.

"I have nothing to say to you, Mr. Batterson. I'm no longer with the T. C."

"Only dare to talk behind my back, hey? That's your caliber. Prefer to talk behind my back about me, do you?"

"I mean to say I have no talk to make to you in order to furnish a show for the public. And I'm not aware that I have any business with you that needs to be talked over. You'll have to excuse me. I'm going to bed."

He pushed past Batterson, who was declaiming again, made his way through the circle of listeners, and climbed the rough stairs. As he went, he heard a description of himself from the boss that made his ears burn; his teeth were set hard when he turned in at his room. He had a healthy desire to cuff that old blusterer's ears, and he congratulated himself that he had come away when he did.

Hale rose before light, anxious to avoid any collision with Batterson. He was first into the dining-room and the first to finish. Batterson did not appear. That was not sur-

prising, for the dawn was hardly red in the frosty east when breakfast was served, and most of those who ate at the first table were drivers and hostlers.

Before the sun was high enough to dissolve the frost-bells on the spruce fronds, Hale was well along the tote-road, out of sight and sound of the Half-Way House.

Batterson's prompt antagonism at their first meeting had astonished the young man. Now Hale understood better why the boss had displayed that enmity, and why its acrimony had increased. It was the old story of a guilty conscience needing no accuser. John Batterson, placed in control as sole executive, had abused his opportunities, and all his suspicion and resentment had at once centered on the first person who appeared to threaten his hold. A forester would understand the butchery of the timber; a stockholder's nephew was too close to headquarters!

Hale swung round a curve where drifts and crowding trees closely hemmed the way—and there was Batterson, on the seat of his jumper. The jumper and the horse



were drawn across the narrow way, barring it as effectually as a gate. Hale pulled up.

Only Batterson's thin nose and hard eyes showed over the breath-frosted edge of his fur collar. He glared at Hale, and his whip-lash marked fantastic curves on the white expanse of the snow as he nervously slashed here and there.

"I guess you weren't looking for me to meet you out here," began Batterson.

"No, I thought I was up and away early enough to avoid you."

"I've got a little private business to transact with you. You've been down-river and lied about me to the T. C. folks. You don't deny it, do you?"

"I do."

"How did they know anything about any mix-up here on this forestry fubduddle unless you went cry-babying down there?"

"I didn't lie and I didn't cry-baby. I told my uncle some months ago the straight facts about why I was forced to give up my job."

"And you've been telling a whole lot

more! Hold on! I don't let a tenderfoot bluff me out of what I know. There never was any trouble about my methods until you came along—and I smelled you coming! You've reported me to headquarters—all lies! You've stolen away my men. Now I get a straight tip you're trying to break the market on log prices. The thing comes to a clinch between you and me right here and now."

Hale thought a moment while Batterson was choking with expletives. He broke in on the boss's speech.

"There's no use arguing with you, Mr. Batterson, or protesting to you. You're determined not to believe what I say. There is no business between us of any kind. This is a free road. Swing your horse. I'm in a hurry."

"There *is* business between us. There's a directors' meeting scheduled, and enough has been said to me over the telephone to show me the pack of lies I'll be up against. You've got to go to headquarters and take back what you said about me."

"I have not one word to take back, Mr. Batterson. In whatever talk I had concerning you, I stated only what happened to me personally—to explain my inability to do what I was sent up here to do. It was my report. It is now in writing and in the hands of the board. Such a statement was demanded from me as an employee. You have never made any explanation of your treatment of me. I suppose you have reserved it for the T. C. people."

Batterson pointed his whip at Hale.

"You won't do what I tell you to do?" he said. "You'll let me go down there and be stabbed by that statement of yours?"

Hale advanced without answering. Batterson held up a hand, huge in its mitten.

"I'm giving you a chance. I can squash you flat. I can put you down and out. I'll bury you and Hard-Luck Anse deeper than the roots of old Tumbledick Mountain. Take the chance I offer you, and go down to headquarters and take back what you said."

"Mr. Batterson, you're a business man, with ten times the experience I have had."

Batterson grunted contemptuously.

"Why do you ask of me what you wouldn't dare to ask of a man of experience in business?"

"Bah!" said the boss.

"And now you threaten to ruin us."

"You've got to straighten this thing at headquarters!" Batterson declared, angrily.

"I'd have to lie to do that. Mr. Batterson, I've endured this abuse from you just as long as human nature can stand it. I demand right of way here."

He started his horse. There was no mistaking his temper and his resoluteness.

Batterson swung his horse, and Hale took the side of the road in a smother of snow.

"You get no pity from me after this!" Batterson shouted, while Hale was still within hearing distance. "You've asked for what you're going to get, and you'll get it."



## CHAPTER XIX

THAT afternoon Hale reached Misery Gore. In the evening he sat down with Leadbetter in the store camp, and gave the details of his trip to the city. He ended by relating his adventures with John P. Batterson.

"An old fellow up here always growled when a day was particularly bright," said Leadbetter. "He said it was a weather-breeder. I've had so much hard luck, Mr. Hale, that all this good luck sort of scares me. Perhaps we need one big black cloud like Batterson."

"We have influence behind us now, and we'll call on it if Batterson tries to interfere with us," Hale declared.

"We'll keep on, Mr. Hale, and mind our own business. There doesn't seem to be much that he can do to us—but I know the man."

In those midwinter days, Leadbetter's

cribwork on White Horse occupied much time. The ice had dammed the water above the gorges, and left a fine chance for work. As the building of the new sluices went on, it was plain that Leadbetter had devised a unique plan to tame the ferocity of White Horse. The material for the cribwork lay at hand—logs that had resisted Leadbetter's efforts when he had tried unsuccessfully to drive the stream in the earlier days.

Those first attempts to harness White Horse had failed because he had used the old-fashioned methods of driving. White Horse was a succession of "jumps," for this side of Misery Mountain was terraced in much the same manner as the opposite side, where the lumbering was going on. Between the jumps the mountain shelves held the waters of the stream in short stretches of dead-water, or in slow-moving eddies. Here and there in the descent a hold-dam restrained the current to make the water available as it was wanted and there were several "splash-dams," built to direct the current and guide the logs.

Those were remnants of the old works. The main defect of the earlier plan was in the sluices that bridged the jumps. When the water had been turned on from the hold-dams and the logs were moving, the sluices overflowed, for the pitch was steep, and the water came down in uncontrollable volume. For most of the way the sluices were shallow cañons between the ledges. The logs, borne high on the rushing torrent, jumped the track like unruly railway-cars, or jackstrawed into inextricable masses of timber. Human arms could not move these masses, and to use dynamite meant too great a waste of logs.

Now, taking advantage of the dry bed, Leadbetter built lanes with log walls down the middle of these sluices.

Here and there were natural receptacles for the ends of his uprights, pot-holes that whirling pebbles had worked in the rocky bed of the stream. These holes were not regularly placed; but with dynamite he made other holes to supplement those nature had provided. Between the uprights the work-

men bolted parallel logs, each "chocked" apart from its neighbor a few inches. Leadbetter declared that these gaps in the sides of the sluices would solve the difficulty of driving the White Horse. The sluices could not overflow, and the logs could not be thrown out upon the ledges. The surplus water would gush through the sides of the cribwork, but enough of the stream would flow between the log walls to carry the drive safely down the mountainside to the waters of the main stream.

A thaw—one of those sudden changes that mark almost every winter—came after the cribwork had been finished. The waters roared for a day or so, as if nature had determined to test this new scheme for conquering one of her strongholds.

After that thaw there was no longer any doubt in Hale's mind in regard to the practicability of Leadbetter's driving device. The cribwork had tamed the White Horse! The freshet exposed the weakness of a few sections and carried away some logs, but it gave Leadbetter a chance to see his mistakes; and



after the water had subsided and the frost had sealed it again, he rebuilt the faulty places more strongly.

With the advance from the Gordons, Hale found his little capital serving his purposes well. His heaviest outlay had been at the start. He was avoiding the usual chief expense in woods operations—hay and grain for a large force of horses. "Susan Puffer" was eating the by-product of the work, and doing valiant service every day. Dozens of logging-men made special trips to Misery to see this economical wonder of the woods; and Stacy's proposed manufacturing company was already forming—thanks to responsible men who had offered capital.

Another reason why Hale was able to do so much with his funds was because Leadbetter had selected men who were willing, and in most cases preferred, to take their season's pay in a lump sum soon after the logs were down. None of the labor troubles that beset John Batterson that season showed their heads on Misery Gore.

Doe ascribed the contentment of the men

to his bill of fare. He mentioned this fact humbly to Hale one day, when his employer asked him if he ever took time to rest.

"A really good cook sleeps standing up, like a horse, sir. The less a man sleeps, the better cook he is. I'm the best cook I know of. The only 'out' I've got is my habit of grabbing in on other folks' business where I ain't wanted. And speaking of that weakness, a fellow was along here the other day who said that John P. Batterson came back from down-country a while ago in a state of mind that the human language hasn't got words for. He said that Batterson was shouting round that you spied on him and reported lies to the T. C., and that your uncle is out to do him, and that you are breaking the log market in this state, and that you are——"

"Hold on, Doe, I don't care for any more gossip! I have kept out of Batterson's affairs as much as I could."

"You're right, sir," agreed Doe, with his accustomed meekness. "It's a failing in any man to be messing—I wish I didn't have

that failing. But I reckon it's ingrown in me."

Before the winter was over, Hale had almost forgotten that he was a forester. He had finished that part of his work in the fall. Afterward he had put his strength to anything that would further the work on Misery. Toiling with cant-dog at the crib-work, he had seconded his partner's expert efforts. He had put the big "scarfs," or notches, into trees before the cross-cut saws began on them—for the big notch directs the fall of the tree, and if the log is to be handled without horses, the fall is important. He had studied the quirks and crochets of Susan Puffer, and had relieved the overworked Stacy, who would entrust his treasure to no other man.

Thus he toiled until the March sun began to light the work for ten hours during the day; until the snow began to melt upon the exposed slopes, and the white garment of winter was torn and frayed here and there; until the waters began to bubble and murmur more loudly under the icy armor of White

Horse, where the great piles of odorous logs were heaped to await the hour when the blackened ice would give way and tumble them into the torrent.

One day, late in the afternoon, Hale found two men waiting for him outside the "wangan" when he walked back to camp from his work. As Hale passed the "dingle," or open shed near the kitchen door, Doe had called his attention to them.

"I can't get anything out of them as to their business, sir. And you know I've got quite a way with me! I've had to fall back on my own suspicions. That dark-complected one is old Cap'n Kidd, and t'other one is 'Rollo the Rover.' They're pirates of some kind, all right. My biscuits scorched just before they showed in sight. Sure cook's sign of something evil!"

One of the strangers was elderly, tall and sallow; a bristly mustache that was palpably darkened with dye gave him a cheap look. The other was a younger man, smartly dressed beneath his fur coat. He advanced



to meet Hale, and held out a card that read, "P. R. Blunt, Attorney at Law."

"We'll step inside with you somewhere," said Mr. Blunt, with a certain offensive positiveness.

When they were inside the store camp, the lawyer introduced his companion: "My client, Mr. Daniel Wincapaw."

The name astonished Hale. It was an uncommon one, and he had never heard it except from Leadbetter. He had understood from his partner that old Esther Wincapaw was the last of the family.

"You seem to be doing quite a lively business on this township," began Mr. Wincapaw, dryly. "A very lively business."

"Yes, we are pretty busy," replied the young man.

"And you're busy on my land, where you haven't any rights—not one, do you understand?"

"No, sir, I don't understand."

"Then I'll proceed to beat it into your head, Mr. Richard Hale—I believe that's your name! I'm the sole owner of this land,

and any contracts you have made with any person are not worth the paper they're written on."

Mr. Wincapaw threw off his fur coat and sat down with an air of being perfectly at home. Before Richard Hale could put any questions, the door of the camp opened, and Anson Leadbetter came in. Doe had met him on his return from the woods and had dropped some disquieting hints in regard to the strangers.

"I'm glad you've come!" cried Hale. "Leadbetter, here is a man who claims to own this township of Misery. He claims that his name is Daniel Wincapaw. He claims——"

"Put it right—put it right!" broke in the man at whom Hale was pointing his finger. "I'm not *claiming*. I'm *asserting*. I *am* Daniel Wincapaw, and I *do* own this township."

He cocked the end of his dyed mustache between his finger and thumb, and looked from one to the other of the partners with a triumphant leer.

"There isn't any such man as Daniel Wincapaw," declared Leadbetter; but his voice shook, and lacked the ring of conviction.

"But here he *is*," declared the stranger, patting his breast. "Hold on one minute, Mr. Leadbetter. I believe that's *your* name! Since I've been back in this state, looking up my affairs, I've got full information of all your dickerings with Esther Wincapaw. You have got what you call a contract with her. You had one with old Jabez and Eben when they were alive—but they didn't have any right to sell something that never belonged to them.

"I tell you they did have the right!" shouted Leadbetter. "I looked up the titles. This is a Revolutionary grant, and I——"

"You don't know what you're talking about!" sneered the other. "I'm the only one of the family who has rights. I am——"

"Hold on, gentlemen!" protested Mr. Blunt. The lawyer had been eyeing his client apprehensively during his outbreak—at least Hale thought his expression showed uneasiness.

"I am a lawyer," he said, "and I can state the thing just as it is. The original grant was made to Malachi Wincapaw, who held a commission as sergeant in the Continental forces."

"I know that," said Leadbetter, whose heat had not moderated. It was being borne in on him what this amazing claim might mean. "And it came from Malachi to his cousins and down through to Jabez and the others."

"There's just where you are mistaken," said Mr. Blunt. "It was simply taken for granted when Malachi died in the West that he had left no family. Communication wasn't frequent in those days, and Malachi's heirs out there in Kansas didn't know for certain that the old man had any property East, and so the matter rested on a general misunderstanding."

"I'm only stating bare facts now, gentlemen," the lawyer went on. "I'll produce the papers just as soon as they are needed. What I say is, this property never belonged to the cousins of Malachi Wincapaw, for



Malachi Wincapaw had heirs of his own, and this gentleman here is his great-great-grandson. He is the last Wincapaw of the line, and owns this township."

"You bet I own it!" exclaimed his client. Mr. Blunt checked him with an expressive frown.

"It is only by chance that Mr. Wincapaw is here now. He happened to read in one of the Western papers about the wonderful success of a make-shift steam log-hauler on a lumber tract in this Eastern state, and in the course of the article—probably copied from some paper this way—the name of Wincapaw was mentioned as that of the owner of the township. It is such an uncommon name that it caught my client's eye; he remembered a family tradition about his ancestor's having a land grant, and he came East to look it up, and engaged me—and here we are! That's the story in a nutshell."

"Well, you'll have to prove it!" declared Hale, although his heart was sick within him.

"Of course," returned Mr. Blunt, politely.

"That will all come about in due season and in due process of law."

"Process of law!" gasped Leadbetter. He looked ten years older than when he had entered the camp. "I know what the law is! Process of law! That means forever and a day! I know all I want to know about your law! I've had law, law, law, all my life! Waiting for law, and 10,000,000 feet of logs on the edge of the White Horse and the spring rains due!"

"Exactly, but the 10,000,000 feet are my client's. You have stripped his land without right or justice on your side."

For fully five minutes there was silence in the little room. Hale and Leadbetter, with knotted brows, sat looking at each other, trying to think the thing out, trying to adjust themselves to the situation, trying to look the disaster in the face. It seemed too awful to be real.

"There have been a number of cases of this kind in the state in past years," said the lawyer. "I have been looking up precedents.

Probably the uncertainty of the title is the reason why this tract was not snapped up by purchase long ago."

"But I tell you the Wincapaws would have known if they had relatives out West!" cried Leadbetter, desperate in his despair, determined not to believe. "They never heard of any relatives. No one ever suggested that there were any others of the family except themselves. I've paid money to them right along. Old Esther would never have taken a cent that didn't belong to her."

"They were mistaken, that's all," said Mr. Blunt, coolly. "They simply didn't know. They always lived down there in a pint bowl, as you might say. Lots of other families have been surprised by having the long-lost pop up all of a sudden."

"I'll go to old Esther as soon as horse-flesh and steam can get me there!" the old man declared, doggedly. "She'll knock your story to pieces."

"Go ahead," said the lawyer. "We've been there already. Of course you couldn't expect her to recognize her kinsman, but you may

be sure she couldn't swear that he wasn't Malachi Wincapaw's descendant—and I'll tell you confidentially that the old lady is pretty much broken up over the thing. No wonder! If you can get any satisfaction out of a visit to her, run down! We are not objecting—rather the contrary. After you've seen her you'll be more willing to quit."

"Quit!" shouted Hale, now in a passion. "This man comes sneering here," he bent a malevolent gaze on the heir, who was twirling his painted mustache, "and claims the fruits of our winter's work—all that we've struggled and frozen and slaved for through frost and snow. It isn't right!"

"The law doesn't take all those things into account," remarked the lawyer.

The young man pondered a while, trying to check the whirl of his thoughts.

"Mr. Wincapaw," he said finally, "before proceeding to the proof of your claims, I'd like to have a little understanding with you about our cut here this winter. I have already contracted for the sale of the logs at a stated price. Will you allow us to move



them at a stumpage figure that will let us out with a fair profit?"

"I won't make any kind of a contract with you," said Mr. Wincapaw, defiantly. "You have come on my property without any right, and you would have robbed me of the whole thing if good luck hadn't given me the hint. You started in by turning up your nose at me and what you called my claims! Claims, hey? I'll show you what they are. You get off here!"

Hale leaped up.

"I never heard of such an attitude in business," he said. "If you want your money for the damage we've done, we'll pay it. But you don't mean to ruin us, do you?"

"I mean to put an injunction on those logs. Not a stick goes down. When my case is proved in the courts, I'll take 'em myself. They're mine. You didn't have any business coming on my land till you found out what you were about. Out West they shoot claim-jumpers. You're lucky to get off with your hides whole. But you've got to get off."

Hale turned to the lawyer.

"This man is apparently acting out of pure malice. If we're on his land, we're here unintentionally. What is there behind this? If an injunction is put on those logs, it will hold up our drive. I know how slowly the courts move. I have many thousands of dollars to pay for labor in the spring. What kind of a trick is this to play on an honest man—hold up his logs?"

"If you want legal advice, you'd better hire another lawyer," Blunt said. "I'm engaged by Mr. Wincapaw."

"I shall put the injunction on the logs as soon as the sheriff can get along here with the papers," insisted the heir. "I was thinking some of putting an injunction on tools and so forth, for wear and tear. But if you move quick, I may let you lug 'em off. You've got to move quick, though."

"I'll take your advice about the other lawyer, Mr. Blunt," Hale said, turning his back on the Wincapaw heir. "In the meantime, there doesn't seem to be anything more to say on either side."

But the lawyer and his client did not take his hint to depart.

On the contrary, Mr. Blunt announced coolly that they proposed to stay for a few days, in order to look over the amount of damage that had been done, and to make sure that the property was not molested any more.

"I'd like to see you drive me off my own land," declared Wincapaw. "And seeing that these camps are mine, built of my own logs, I'll stow myself where it'll be most comfortable to me."

He went out, followed by Blunt, and in a few moments the partners heard him calling to the cook to give him something to eat.

## CHAPTER XX

FOR the first half-hour, the conversation between Hale and Leadbetter was doleful and disjointed. The blow had fallen heavily and quickly; they could not recover from it in a moment. Doe came to the door to tell them that supper was ready. They asked him to bring it to them there. The prospect of meeting the two strangers in the other camp was not tempting.

“If that drive doesn’t go down, Leadbetter, we stand beholden to these men for their winter’s wages, for the hire of the log-hauler—and where the money is to come from I don’t know! It’s ruin! Of Marion and the Gordons I don’t dare to think!”

“I reckon that John P. Batterson has borrowed that man from Tophet for this occasion,” said Leadbetter.

“Do you suspect he is a fraud?”

“I don’t know what he is. But if that man can show enough of a case to get an



injunction on our moving the cut, it means that we are ruined. It's the same old story for me. Probably he's Wincapaw, all right. He claims to have his papers."

When Doe brought their food, his air of suppressed excitement showed that the news of the calamity had leaked out.

"If half of the big talk that Cap'n Kidd is making out yonder to the men is true," he said, "you'll need more than spring medicine to perk up your appetites, gents."

"So he is trying to stampede our crew, is he?" Hale asked.

"Don't know what he is trying to do to 'em, but they won't stampede right away—not with their winter's wages due. If you want me to announce to 'em that they'll get a speech from the throne pretty quick, I'll so report," volunteered Doe. "Not meaning to grab in, but only wishing to be helpful."

"We can attend to our business without any help," replied Hale, at the limit of his endurance.

"Most likely," returned the unabashed Doe. "I'll attend to mine, too. I've been

advising the boys to put their workmen's lien on the logs. It may mean quite a spell of waiting if the drive doesn't go down this spring, but there's nothing like looking ahead."

"I'll add my own word to that advice, Doe," said Hale. "You may tell them I'm going outside for legal advice, and I'll help them in putting their lien on. I didn't mean to be short with you, but this is bitter trouble Leadbetter and I are in."

"I've walked round Cap'n Kidd twenty-seven times to date," said Doe. "I'm viewing him from all points of the compass. You never can tell, you know," he added, mysteriously. But he only shook his head when Hale questioned him, and hurried away.

"That's the most chronic case of messing in other people's affairs I've ever met," said Hale. "I hope he doesn't set our crew by the ears with his hints and his sea-lawyer foolishness."

"I'll hold 'em in line until you get back; I feel I can do that much," replied Leadbetter.

Hale was ready to start out at daybreak, after Doe had served him with a hasty breakfast.

"I'll keep walking round him, Mr. Hale," said the cook. "You don't know what I mean, but it's no matter. I won't tell you, for you'd think I was grabbing in."

Hale made no comment on Doe's cryptic utterances. His own thoughts occupied his mind. As he journeyed, his despair became blacker, and he came to his uncle in the city, haggard and woebegone.

"I'll not tell you that I expected this," said the man of business, when he had heard the dismal tale. "But there's always a chance of some such complication in regard to timber lands. So I am not particularly astonished, though I am sorry for your sake, my boy. When Batterson was here he let drop some hints that you might run against a snag of this kind. He said Misery would have been bought up long ago if the title had been clear. I didn't pay much attention to him. But I know of similar cases. On Long Pond plantation McDowell lost every cent he had

in the world when a real heir came along. This Wincapaw may be a real heir. I'll take you to my lawyer. But when you get into law you must be prepared to resign yourself to delays."

The interview with the lawyer did not bring much consolation to Hale. The lawyer said that the court would probably grant the alleged heir a temporary injunction. He advised Hale not to oppose that too strongly, for such a contest would only delay the affair, and, of course, extra delays would settle the fate of the drive that season, no matter which way the case eventually went.

To prepare for the hearing on the permanent injunction, they must collect evidence that the stranger was not a rightful heir. That meant making an investigation in the West. The lawyer drew attention to the fact that Wincapaw seemed to have little regard for Hale's interests. His action in blocking the drive showed that. "The logs would be worth all the more to him if they were down-river, but he is apparently ugly," the lawyer said.



"Or else there's some plot behind it all, simply for the sake of ruining Richard and his partner," said Hale's uncle. "Their manœuvres look suspicious to me."

"Suspensions must be proved in law. I'll do my best to help you prove them. We'll make them hurry the hearing for the temporary injunction, take what proofs they put forward at that time, and I'll set my Western correspondents at work. We can do no more."

"And the ice is already moving in the White Horse!" said Hale.

But the solemn routine of the law does not take into account the desperate anxieties of impetuous young men. After Hale had remained in the city two days, he was in a highly nervous state in spite of Marion's brave encouragement.

"Richard, you'd better get back to the woods, and wait for results there," his uncle advised him. "As no particular fight is to be made against the temporary injunction, it will be just as well if you are represented by counsel. And I'll be on hand, of course."

You're only fretting yourself to death down here. Go back, and watch over your interests on Misery."

Wincapaw and his lawyer had left the camp when Hale arrived after an exhausting journey over rotting snow and dangerous lake ice.

His crew were anxious and downcast. Leadbetter was ill in his bunk; his strength and courage had at last been beaten out of him.

The sullen "cookee," or cook's helper, informed Hale that Doe had deserted. "Leastways, after moping round here a few days, talking to himself and acting queer, he lit out without saying a word. And it's been pretty hard on me. I don't know about staying, if I ain't going to get any pay for it."

"Doe has been losing his mind for some time, according to my reckoning," volunteered the teamster who cared for the few horses on Misery. "I caught him in the hovel snipping hair out of the manes and tails of that roan pair. He wouldn't give me any reasons, and went at me with a pitch-

fork when I interfered with him. There's been a hoodoo put on this whole thing! I reckon we'll all be leaving, and take our chances on getting our pay."

Hale realized now that his uncle's advice that he return to the camp had been wise. He found his hands full in quelling this growing mutiny. He even followed a half-dozen men down the tote-road five miles, overtook them, and forced them to return by sheer strength of will.

His resolution had some effect in straightening out the general situation, and it was agreed among the men that this wild-eyed young man was dangerous in his present state of mind. They succumbed in surly fashion; the whole atmosphere on Misery Gore was charged with distrust and despair.

Stacy kept doggedly at work, using the last of the sledding for finishing the log haul. He was trying to make a record for his engine, and his own personal interest in that effort made him unwilling to quit the job, but even "Susan Puffer" snorted through the trees with an angry note in her exhausts.

At last Misery Gore fully deserved its depressing name!

The White Horse had broken his winter bonds, and was roaring down his gorges, fairly clamoring for logs to be fed to him. Those logs were high on the banks, and the precious water was running away from them.

After a few days, Wincapaw returned to the camp with his lawyer and a deputy sheriff, and the injunction was duly placed. The young man accepted the service of the paper without a word.

The heir and his lawyer settled in camp to enjoy life. They insultingly refused Hale's last appeal that they would coöperate with him to the extent of starting the drive, and leave the ownership to be finally settled by the courts. He was pleading as much for his crew as for himself.



## CHAPTER XXI

THEN the unexpected return of Doe broke the cruel monotony of those days of waiting. He came tramping in through the slush one afternoon, with six strange men at his heels.

Hale did not receive his recreant cook with cordiality. Doe's utter self-possession irritated the young man.

"I reckoned that you'd notice the difference in the cooking, but I hope no one has had dyspepsy out of it," remarked Doe, suavely.

Hale was too much disgusted by the cook's effrontery to make any comment. The little man led his companions into the "dingle" with as much assurance as if he were still master of the cook's domain. When they were eating, Doe came across to the "wangan" porch, where Hale was sitting disconsolately.

"You said to yourself when you got back

here, 'Well, there's Doe slipped up on me like all the rest of the Misery proposition.' That's what you said, I suppose."

Doe was trying to speak in his usual bland tones, but he had an air of excitement that caught Hale's attention. However, at that moment he was not interested in any topic that Doe might be able to present.

"I don't think I had any talk with myself on the subject," he answered.

"If that's the case, you didn't put in any time wondering at some of the remarks I let drop about walking round Cap'n Kidd, hey?"

"I think your remarks, as you call them, were probably as silly as your action in mangling my horses' tails and manes."

"That's just the way I like to hear you talk," said Doe, slapping his leg. "When I get ready to heap coals of fire, Mr. Hale, I like to have the head where I'm going to heap 'em, tipped back, proud and haughty. Mr. Hale," the little cook straightened himself, and pounded his fist on his chest, "I'll have to ask you to follow me, and keep your

mouth shut, no matter what you see. Come on, I say! Follow me! No questions!"

It was a mandate not to be resisted. There was something in Doe's tones and air that impressed his employer. Wondering, he followed the cook across to the main camps. The strangers, who had just finished munching their cookies, obeyed the leader's beckoning and fell in behind. They marched into the camp.

Wincapaw sat there, reading a paper-covered novel and smoking a cigar with deep content. Blunt was dozing in a bunk. Most of Hale's crew were lounging round the room on the long benches, whittling moodily.

It was plain that Doe believed in short, sharp action for his little drama.

"Now, according to rules and plans laid down," he shouted, in excited *staccato*, "the signal is, 'Pop goes the weasel!'"

His body-guard of six promptly fell upon Wincapaw and pinioned him with their big hands. Blunt leaped up, but Doe sent him back with a thrust that drove him against the wall.

"You keep out of this," he snarled, "or there'll be one less cheap lawyer in the world!"

"Bring me a few licks of molasses!" Doe called to the cookee, who stood staring in the door.

When the cookee returned with the molasses, Doe walked up to the heir, who could make no move except to blink his eyes, and smeared some of the thick sirup on the contorted face. Then he shook out something that he dragged from the breast of his jacket. It was a bunch of hair, and had evidently been knotted in a mat with much skill, for when Doe fitted it to Wincapaw's face, the hair proved to be a very fair imitation of a bristly, sandy-colored beard, sprinkled with gray.

"Considering that it's made out of horses' manes and tails, it ain't a bad job," said Doe.

The crew of Misery had rushed forward and stood watching the transformation with wide-open eyes. When the beard was fitted, there were shouts of astonishment.

"There! You know that fellow now, don't



you?" shouted the triumphant cook. "Let these men I've brought with me speak first. They know him best, now that the fleece is back that he shaved off to play this dirty trick on honest men!"

But the victim had got his voice at last, and was shrieking that he would have them all in jail for assaulting him.

"You better quit that talk," said one of the men who were holding him. "We know you, all right, 'Weasel' Murdock, and so do the rest of the guides in this section. You've stolen enough supplies from us to make you a well-known figure, when your whiskers are back where they belong."

"Know him!" cried one of the men in Hale's crew, who had pressed close with the rest. "Of course it's Weasel Murdock! Why didn't we see it before?"

"It's because you didn't walk round him times enough," said Doe, "and because you haven't got detective blood in you, and because you haven't tended to grabbing in all your life."

"This is sheer nonsense!" shouted Blunt.

"All a lie!" insisted the purple-faced heir. "I never heard of a man named Murdock! I'll make you suffer for this!"

"This critter," went on Doe, "is a fellow who has lived a good many years in the woods north of here, dodging round from place to place, and getting his living stealing from guides and sporting camps when the owners are away. You see, Mr. Hale," he turned on that young man, who stood dumb with amazement, "that habit of mine of grabbing in makes me know a good many people. I make it a point to know 'em. And though this critter has dodged round so fast that most folks wouldn't recognize him without his whiskers and with his mustache dyed, I kept walking round him till I guessed. Then, to make sure, I went to hunt him up at his main camp where he hides,—I found that long ago, being interested in all such things,—and he wasn't there, and hadn't been for a long time. But he's here, and there's plenty of men who will swear to him."

"Let 'em swear!" raged the captive. "I'm

Daniel Wincapaw, and I own this township, and I'll put you behind bars for this!"

The biggest man in Hale's crew stepped forward, close to the raving man. He put out one giant hand, and choked the heir until his eyes were bloodshot and his tongue hung out. It was the woods method of getting to bottom facts without waste of time.

"You needn't lie to me, Weasel Murdock!" he growled. "I know you. You've stolen a good many slick pieces of fur from my traps, and once I caught you. I'll bet you haven't forgotten it! And I put my mark on you, you dirty whelp!" He pushed Murdock's hair away from his ear, and exhibited a deep scar in the cartilage. "There's my notch, gentlemen! You ain't content with petty sneak-thieving. You're out now to rob this crew of their hard winter's work. You know what a woods crew is when it gets started! Do you want me to give the word to this one?"

The man, cowed by the giant's grip, looked round the circle of angry faces, saw their

flaming eyes, saw the men clenching their fists, and heard the mutterings. He knew what a woods crew was when it got started!

"The bluff is off!" he gasped. "Let me go; and I'll turn state's evidence."

"You be careful!" cried Blunt, but his client was afraid of no lawyer; his fear was of those growling men, whose enemy he had been in the past, and whom he had been threatening with still more grievous evil.

"I'll tell you the truth!" he cried. "I'm Murdock, all right. I never thought I'd come through with the scheme, anyway. I was going to skip after the drive was held up. I couldn't back up the Western yarn. It was John Batterson's get-up. He hired me. It's his plan and his brains. I'm being honest with you, boys. Don't come on me for it. Batterson hired me. He furnished the lawyer and everything. It's all his job."

Blunt had edged behind the men in the excitement, but Hale's grip fell on the lawyer as he was making for the door, and the young man shook him until Blunt quavered



appeals for mercy. Hale's violence was not entirely the result of his grudge against this tool of Batterson's. He felt such a wild tumult in his mind, such a desire to leap, to shout, to scream out his feelings, that he could not help mauling the lawyer a little.

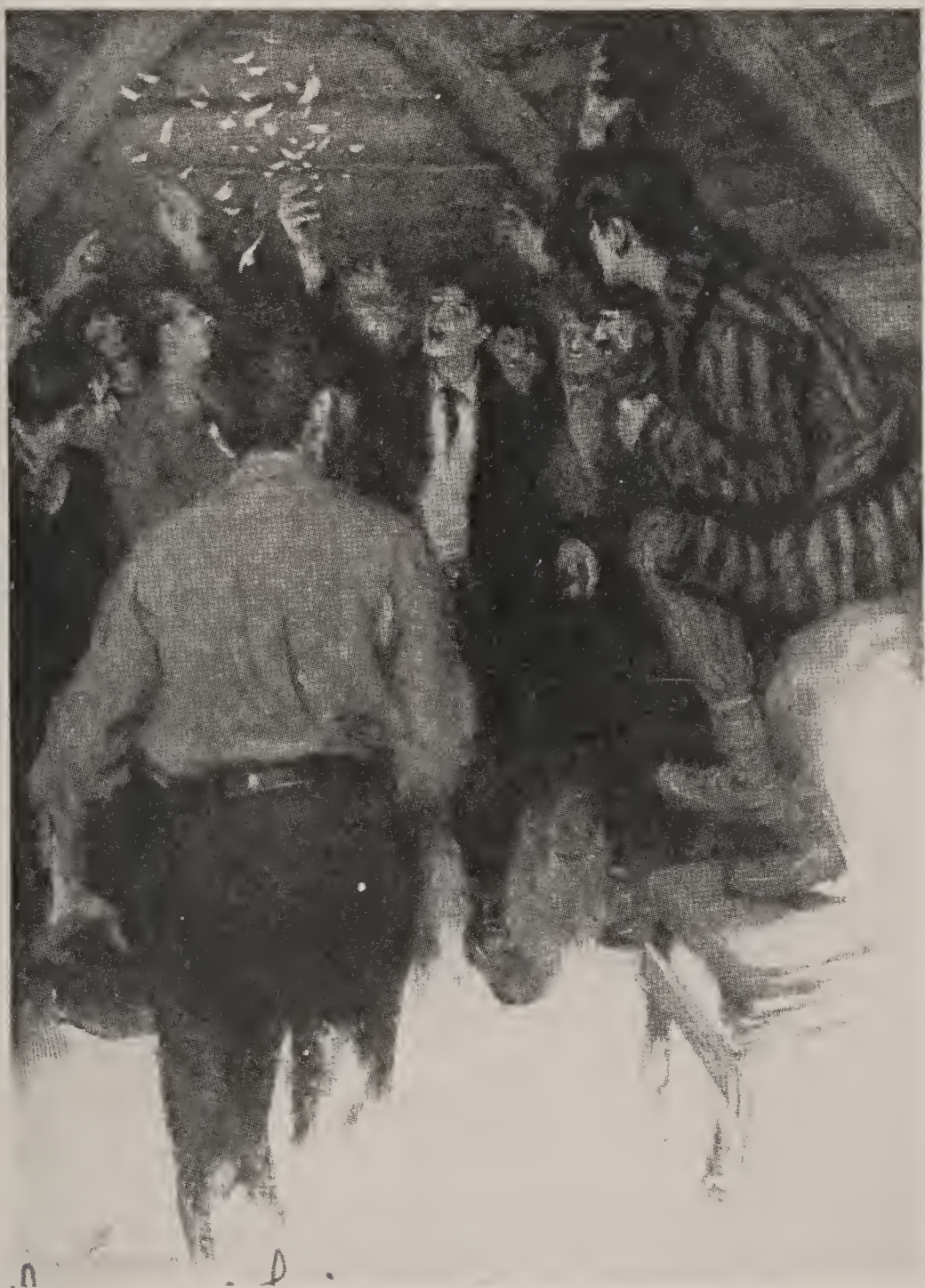
He looked up suddenly, and saw Leadbetter staggering into the door. The shouts of the men, who were now cheering like lunatics, had brought him out of his bunk.

"What is it, Mr. Hale—what is it?" he cried.

"What is it?" shrieked Hale, as he fairly lifted the unhappy Blunt, and brandished him before Leadbetter. "It's success for us, it's life, it's glory—oh, good old Anse, get Doe to tell you! I'm too happy to do anything except yell." He threw Blunt away from him.

"Tie up the two of 'em," he commanded. "Truss 'em like calves bound for market. They're going down country, and they're going to start now! I'm going with 'em!"

He dragged the notice of the injunction



HE TOSSED THE FLUTTERING FLAKES OVER THE  
HEADS OF HIS ROARING MEN



out of his pocket and tore it into bits, and tossed the fluttering flakes over the heads of his roaring men.

"There's no question of what will become of that injunction when I get down there!" he cried. "That water is running away from us. In with those logs! There isn't a judge on the bench who will blame us. In with the logs men! And I'll be back here inside a week, wading waist-deep with you. But first of all,"—he leaped upon a bench and dragged the blushing Doe up with him,—“first of all, give three cheers for this little guardian angel of us all! Brother Doe, the king of all detectives was spoiled when you made yourself the best woods cook who ever dipped doughnuts! No, three cheers are not enough!” he called when they were given, and Doe was struggling to escape. “Three times three!”

And when the “tiger” came, he heaved Doe into the arms that were waiting for him, and then led the parade round the camp outside, with the protesting cook riding high on the shoulders of the men.



That night, with a man to help him, Hale started down-country with his captives. He left behind him a new Leadbetter—made young and strong once more by sheer happiness.

## CHAPTER XXII

IT was a rapid although silent trip that Hale made with his captives. The man who accompanied him was the giant who had cowed Murdock; as a game-warden, he had legal power to arrest men in the unorganized regions of the state. Consequently, Hale listened to Blunt's protests against what he termed illegal arrest with great composure.

Blunt was still in a fighting mood. But he and the Wincapaw claimant had been whiling away time on Misery by slaughtering deer in the close season, an offense that had attracted little attention. Now it furnished the game warden with an adequate reason for making the arrest.

At the shire town of the county the big warden turned the prisoners over to the sheriff on the charge of having killed game out of season. Hale saw them placed in cells, and went back to the hotel, knowing that before they could find any one to give

bail for them the affair would be in the hands of competent lawyers.

At the first opportunity he had telegraphed to his uncle and his lawyer, and had urged them to meet him at the shire town. They were with him before he slept that night.

"I'm not surprised at Blunt's going into the scheme, if he was paid enough," said the lawyer. "He has been on the ragged edge of disbarment for some years. Undoubtedly, both he and Murdock intended to drop out of sight after the drive had been held up for the season. About all the damage would have been accomplished in these few weeks of hold-up. I can understand why those two blacklegs are in the affair. But as for John Batterson—do you believe what they say? It was a madman's act, backing such a plot with such tools!"

"It's hard to believe it," said Hale, "but if it had been simply a case of plain financial hold-up, these men would have had their hands stretched out for money. They refused to compromise. Their purpose was to

ruin us as a firm—put us out of business on the river.”

“After the last directors’ meeting, Batterson knew that he was at the end of his rope with the Telos Company,” said Weston Hale. “As soon as we began to dig into his affairs, we uncovered an amazing system of petty stealings and graft. You see, business in the woods is different from any other kind; you put an experienced field manager in charge, and are obliged to leave details to him. Evidently Batterson found how easy it was to dip in for himself, and kept getting bolder. He couldn’t have kept it up much longer, but he dates all disclosures from the time my nephew appeared on the ground. I’ll admit that the plot that has just been exposed is almost too much to believe. But a man gets used to a certain amount of lawlessness in the woods, and sometimes doesn’t stop to weigh chances.”

“Of course the identification of Murdock will promptly dissolve that temporary injunction,” said the lawyer. “That’s the first big item.”



"I took a chance on that," confessed Hale. "The logs are running. We couldn't afford to miss the driving pitch—and it's hard work getting messages to Misery."

"I think the spirit of the law will cover your case," the lawyer said. "I'll attend to the letter of the law the first thing in the morning. Now what are my instructions for the next move? This case has come to a head on the eve of the April term here—the criminal term. The grand jury begins its sessions day after to-morrow. You seem to have two pretty important witnesses bottled up in the county jail."

"I suppose there's only one thing to do," said Weston Hale. "That's to place our evidence in the hands of the county attorney and let the matter run its course."

"What action are the Telos people taking in regard to Batterson's affairs?"

"We're not going to prosecute. The directors are half to blame, anyway. They gave over everything into his hands. He was making ingoing crews tote goods without pay, and was collecting toting fees from the

company for his own pocket. He even went to selling supplies and taking the money, half-feeding our crews, and keeping a labor fuss going all the time. Our directors ought to have known about such matters. We hate to have such mismanagement of our business shown up, even for the sake of punishing Batterson. We're simply going to discharge him. But this matter of the Misery Gore conspiracy seems to be out of our hands."

"I'm interested mostly in one thing now," cried Richard Hale, "and that's in seeing the Misery logs go down into the river to join the main drive! Have I got to stay away from my work to fight Batterson? The man has abused me, but I'd rather be attending to my business than fighting him in court."

"That's a very proper spirit," said the lawyer, "but the affair must take its course in the courts. Moving to secure the dissolving of the injunction will open the case. The county attorney must be informed of the circumstances. You'll be called before the grand jury."

It was in no spirit of resignation that Hale

sat down to await the convening of the grand jury, even though the county attorney, after a conference, agreed to call witnesses in the case at the very opening of the session.

The next day it became apparent that Blunt was still belligerent. He sent several telegrams, and demanded a hearing on the poaching charge. After the summons had been served on him, commanding his attendance before the grand jury, he sent more telegrams.

Late that evening Hale, his uncle, the game-warden and their attorney were going over the case in anticipation of the meeting of the grand jury the following morning.

"The county attorney has decided to make Batterson the principal in the indictment," said the lawyer. "Murdock has volunteered as a witness; Blunt will have to talk. As difficult as it is to believe that a man in Batterson's position would——"

Hard knuckles banged upon the door, the door was flung open, and John P. Batterson stalked in.

"I believe in taking the bull by the horns,

gentlemen!" he cried. His hard eyes searched face after face. At that moment he seemed more self-possessed than any of the others in the room.

"If you see any horns here, take hold of them, Batterson," said Mr. Weston Hale.

Batterson shut the door, and came into the center of the room. "I take it you weren't looking for me," he observed.

"I knew that four of the telegrams Blunt sent out to-day were for you," said the lawyer. "But I certainly didn't think you would care to hurry in this direction."

"This is just the place where I belong when there's a plot on foot to carry me before the grand jury on the word of a sneak-thief and a renegade lawyer."

"There is no plot. But there is to be an investigation of certain extraordinary matters," said the attorney.

"This spy is still at his work, eh?" Batterson pointed a gaunt finger at Hale.

The young man leaped to his feet; his eyes were flashing.

"Batterson," he cried, "you don't need to



have me rehearse your efforts to ruin me since I met you up in those woods! I have never interested myself in any of your business. I did what I told you I should do—I told the Telos people why I could not carry out my orders while I was in their employ. My conscience is entirely clear. Now I'll take no more insults from you!"

"This is no time for your insolence, Batterson," said Weston Hale. "The Telos people have given you a chance you didn't deserve. That consideration ought to soften you. But you come raging in here more brazen than ever. What's the matter with you?"

"You are proposing to take a mess of lies before the grand jury of this county!" cried Batterson.

"What Murdock says may be a lie; I hope it is, for the sake of a man who has held your position in this part of the country. But it's for the grand jury to weigh the evidence."

"I've come here to warn you against trying to slop any of your guesswork evidence over on to me!" shouted Batterson. "I sup-

pose you thought I was the kind of a man who would lie down, stick four paws in the air, and ki-yi for mercy because a liar got busy with my affairs. I've seen Blunt. Blunt knows that Murdock has lied. I'm going to fight this thing. I like to serve notice on men when I'm fighting 'em. I'm here to do it." He turned on the younger Hale. "When a raw-boned cub of your dimensions comes round on my stamping-ground and tries to run me out of business, I don't propose to let him get away with it. And you can take that for just what it's worth!"

Then he stamped out of the room.

"Well, gentlemen," remarked the lawyer, "I think you perceive that the law must be allowed to take its course with the intractable Mr. Batterson."

The next day Richard Hale and the big game-warden were called before the grand jury. They gave their testimony, and were permitted to go about their business. That business for Richard was on Misery Gore just then.

"There's no need of sitting round here and waiting for that jury to rise," his lawyer said to him. "Here's the court order dissolving the injunction. I'll inform you by letter of the findings of the grand jury."

With a light heart, Hale hastened back to Misery. The logs were running beautifully. Leadbetter's sluices were entirely successful. The overflow gushed through the cribwork, the logs rode safe. Even the more skittish ones that reared high on the flood and leaped at the rim of the sluices could not scale the barrier.

The men of the crew had become an enthusiastic band. Leadbetter declared that every man was worth two of the ordinary sort, and that Doe was the equal of four cooks; he followed the drive down the stream with his outfit, pitched camp each night in a new place, and gave his men four good meals every day.

"You didn't mention outside, did you, Mr. Hale, that a good detective is up here wasting his time?" asked Doe one day.

"No, sir! For you're nailed to this job

for the rest of your natural life at double the wages paid any cook in these north woods."

"I don't know what detectives get for pay," said Doe, thoughtfully, "and I don't care now. I'm better suited—and I'll do your private detecting—that is, if I won't be accused of grabbing in."

Hale laughed, and slapped him on the back.

A week later Hale received a letter from his lawyer. Before the grand jury, Murdock had denied that Batterson had been implicated in the alleged plot to stop the work on Misery. He declared that when he had accused Batterson, he was in fear of his life, and had merely been trying to shift responsibility. Blunt had been equally insistent before the jury that Batterson had not been concerned.

That much of the secrets of the grand-jury room the county's prosecuting attorney had confided to interested persons in the case.

"It is plain to me and to your uncle," the lawyer added, "that Batterson has been using money again. His tools are willing to earn



pay by shouldering his guilt. Both were indicted for conspiracy with intent to defraud, pleaded *nolo contendere*, and were sentenced to three years each in state prison. The punishment is not adequate, in my opinion, and it is unfortunate that Batterson has escaped. But the case was hurried to the grand-jury room before a thorough investigation could be made, and we must abide by the result. There is an element of comfort in the situation for you, however.

"The Telos Company heard of certain threats that Batterson had been making. He had declared publicly that he would see what dynamite would do in bringing people to their senses in the north country. The directors of the Telos Company called him in, laid a list of his dishonest transactions before him, and gave him a chance to leave the state and escape punishment. They put the matter so strongly to him that he has left. The course may be questionable from a point of justice, but the Telos people wished to get rid of him as easily as possible. I think you are now safe from persecution by a man who,

as far as you were concerned, was a dangerous maniac."

Hale passed the letter to Leadbetter.

"Jail is the right kind of punishment for the wickedness of some people," Leadbetter remarked, after he had read the communication. "But what has happened to John P. Batterson hits him as hard as any jail sentence could do. Mr. Hale, that man was drunk with the power he had up in this country. He didn't want to see me succeed—he didn't want to have any one be anything up here. That man's punishment began the day you landed in these parts. He saw that the Telos people were starting something new in forestry matters, and that it was going to expose him. So he put up a fight."

A few weeks later, when the Misery logs were well along in the main streams, a messenger brought Hale an important communication from the directors of the Telos Company. There was also a letter from Weston Hale. That letter cautioned the young man against being too much set up by

his new honors, since the appointment was partly the result of personal "pull." A loyal and admiring uncle at headquarters was largely responsible for the fact that Richard Hale had been made temporary master of the Telos drive for that season in place of Batterson.

Weston Hale added that emissaries from the company had privately observed Richard's system on Misery, and that the directors were sure he could do their business successfully.

Thus it happened that the Misery logs "joined drives" not only with the Gordons' timber but also with the logs of the Telos Company, and there was no quarrel over the right of way on those waters, for "Hammerhead" Batterson's domination had been abolished for all time.

"When I picked you for a partner, my heart told me I was picking right," Leadbetter said to Hale. "But I didn't know I was picking a partner who would open the river to us in this syle. Mr. Hale, they

never again can call me 'Hard-Luck' Anse."

The story how the drive came bouncing down in record time to the big sorting-boom is now a matter of river history. Richard Hale proved himself an excellent master of men. More than that, by his management of the lumber operation on Misery, he had shown what the applied science of forestry could accomplish in preserving resources.

In the way of a celebration there was a dinner-party in Sister Marion's home. The honored guests were Richard and Jeff Gordon. The latter respected the hostess's nerves by his remarkable control of his voice. He yelled his "Wah-hoo-wah" only once, and then humbly apologized. But he was assured by Marion that the occasion was helped by the explosion.

In the summer, the directors of the Telos Company, after inspecting Misery Gore and their own tracts of land, concluded that the modern science of forestry has much to do with profitable lumbering.

Benjamin Stacy, president of the Stacy



Log-Hauling Machine Company, received a letter containing an order for ten engines, jocosely referred to in the postscript as "Susan Puffers." The letter was signed, "Richard Hale, Field Manager for the Telos Company."

When a timber operator has as able a helper as Anson Leadbetter, he can afford to leave private affairs in his partner's hands. When the Telos Company had made its offer, Richard Hale had been aware of this fact. And Misery Gore is turning her full quota of logs into the streams each spring, under the direction of Leadbetter.

However, if you study the new timber tract maps that Hale has prepared, you will not find on them the name "Misery Gore." The tract is plotted as "Leadbetter's Luck," and its registered log-mark is a horseshoe.

The partners adopted the name and mark at the suggestion of Peter Doe, who prefaced his proposal with an apology for "grabbing in." But Doe, who has been presented with a silent partnership in the Mis-

ery venture, was really only grabbing into his own business that time. And furthermore, he has business enough of his own that demands his attention. He is field steward for all the Telos camps, with a score of cooks to hire and oversee.

THE END













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